China-Central Asia Summit

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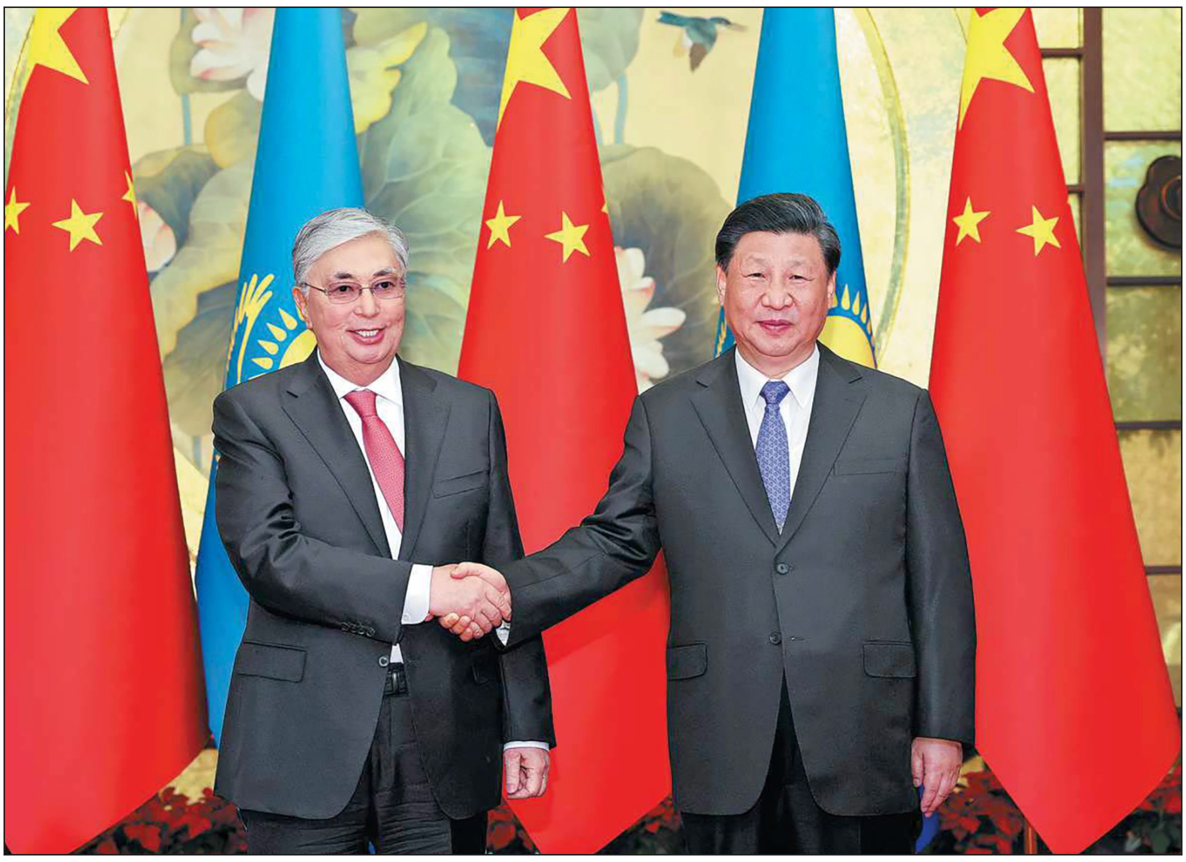

President Xi Jinping shakes hands with visiting Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev during a meeting in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Wednesday. LIU BIN / XINHUA

Sino-Kazakh ties to deepen

Presidents call for broader steps to strengthen pragmatic cooperation

By XU WEI in Xi'an
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China and Kazakhstan agreed on Wednesday to build up cooperation on economy, trade, production capacity, investment and emerging sectors such as renewable energy, as part of broader steps to strengthen pragmatic cooperation.

President Xi Jinping and visiting Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev reached the consensus during their talks in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Wednesday.

The two leaders signed a joint statement in which the two nations agreed to promote cooperation on transportation to stabilize industry and supply chains, including steps to explore building a third cross-border railway line and constructing new railway border ports.

Both sides underscored the significance of safeguarding political security and opposing foreign interference in the domestic affairs of the two nations, and they agreed to enhance cooperation on preventing "color revolutions".

Tokayev arrived in Xi'an on Wednesday for a state visit and to attend the China-Central Asia Summit on Thursday and Friday. Wednesday also was the 70th birthday of Tokayev, the first Central Asian leader to arrive in Xi'an for the summit.

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Shaanxi urged to further advance modernization

By CAO DESHENG in Xi'an
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President Xi Jinping has urged Shaanxi province to actively serve and integrate itself into the nation's new development paradigm and play an exemplary role in advancing Chinese modernization in the country's western region.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks on Wednesday in Xi'an, the provincial capital, when hearing a work report about Shaanxi's socio-economic development.

He is in Xi'an to chair the China-Central Asia Summit, which will be held on Thursday and Friday.

Hearing the work report by Zhao Yide, Party secretary of Shaanxi, Xi said that the province should leverage its own strengths based on its actual conditions in writing a new chapter of advancing Chinese modernization, while keeping in mind the primary task of high-quality growth and the nation's overall development.

He stressed the need for the province to promote innovation in science and technology, build a modern industrial system, bolster the coordinated development of urban and rural areas, expand high-level opening-up and strengthen ecological conservation.

Efforts should be focused on developing the real economy, Xi said. While continuing to act as a pacesetter in its traditional pillar industries, the province needs to be bold enough to foster competitiveness in new fields, he said.

Xi asked Shaanxi to bear in mind the nation's strategic needs and the frontier fields of international competition, carry out major national scientific and technological projects and overcome difficulties in core technologies in key fields.

Efforts should be made to build Xi'an into a comprehensive national scientific center and sci-tech innovation center, and make it a base for high-tech industries and manufacturing, Xi said.

Noting that the most arduous task for advancing common prosperity lies in promoting the development of the countryside, Xi called for narrowing the development gap between urban and rural areas.

Efforts should be made to actively promote the construction of new-type townships at the county level and improve the counties' infrastructure and public services, he said.

Xi called for improving policies and mechanisms that contribute to the integrated development of urban and rural areas to enable resources in urban areas to flow into the countryside in an orderly manner, and ultimately promote the vitality of agricultural and rural development.

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Xi orders all-out efforts for rescue of capsized boat's crew

By CAO DESHENG

President Xi Jinping has ordered all-out search and rescue efforts after a Chinese deep-sea fishing vessel capsized on Tuesday in the Indian Ocean with a 39-member crew on board.

The crew members of *Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028*, comprising 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesian and five Philippine sailors, have been missing since 3 am on Tuesday when the incident occurred in the central part of the Indian Ocean.

In an instruction, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, urged relevant departments to activate the emergency response mechanism immediately, send more rescue professionals to the scene and coordinate with international maritime search and rescue teams.

He ordered that efforts be made to further strengthen the early warning system to prevent potential risks in deep-sea operations so as to ensure the safety of life and property.

In a separate instruction, Premier Li Qiang urged all-out efforts to reduce casualties and strengthen safety management of fishing vessels to ensure safer maritime transport and operations.

The capsized vessel was owned by Penglai Jinglu Fishery Co, a major fishing company based in Yantai, Shandong province.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Transport and Shandong province have activated the emergency response mechanism to organize rescue work.

China has deployed two vessels — the *Lu Peng Yuan Yu 018* and *Yuan Fu Hai* — to assist in the rescue operation. The Foreign Ministry has launched an emergency mechanism for consular protection, involving embassies and consulates in Australia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Indonesia, the Philippines and other countries.

As of press time, none of the missing people had been found and rescue efforts remained underway.

Speaking at a regular news conference on Wednesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said that China will continue to take all measures to search for and rescue the crew of the capsized vessel.

China appreciates Australia's timely assistance and its efforts to coordinate other passing foreign vessels to join the rescue operation, Wang said.

It is hoped that neighboring countries will work with China to continue the joint search and rescue operation, and not give up the hope of saving lives, he added.

HIGHER GROUND

Experts: Nation remains hot spot for FDI

By ZHONG NAN
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China will remain a highly favored investment destination for global companies this year, given its latest policy measures to boost market confidence and efforts to reinforce its position in global industrial, innovation and capital chains, experts and business executives said on Wednesday.

Despite a slowdown in the growth pace of utilizing foreign direct investment during the first four months of 2023, compared with the first quarter, experts believe that China's efforts to introduce consumption stimulus packages, launch the yearlong "Invest in China" campaign, and create more access to modern service industries will continue to attract FDI amid rising external uncertainties.

China's actual use of FDI grew by 2.2 percent year-on-year to 499.46 billion yuan ($71.4 billion) in the first four months of 2023, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

The country saw FDI increase 4.9 percent year-on-year to 408.45 billion yuan in the first quarter of this year.

China has accelerated the pace of further releasing its market potential and smoothed channels for coordination and communication between the government and foreign companies, said Zhang Fei, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's Institute of Foreign Investment.

To attract more global capital, over 20 promotional events will take place this year. These will help foreign investors learn more about China's investment policies, business environment and emerging market opportunities, Shu Jueting, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Commerce, said recently.

Multinational corporations have been capitalizing on market opportunities and accelerating their investment efforts in China. Specifically, they have shown considerable interest in high-end consumption and manufacturing, healthcare and green sectors, said Sang Baichuan, dean of University of International Business and Economics' Institute of International Economy.

Among the major sources of FDI, the influx from France jumped 567.3 percent year-on-year during the January-April period, while that from the United Kingdom surged 323.7 percent, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Chen Yudong, president for China at Robert Bosch GmbH, a German industrial and technology group, said China has enormous potential in the areas of intelligent electrified mobility, smart manufacturing and carbon neutrality, offering many opportunities to global companies.

Joerg Wuttke, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, said China will continue to play an important role, given the size of the Chinese economy and its level of integration with the global economy.

Job prospects

University graduates consult a recruitment officer at a job fair in Haikou, Hainan province, on Wednesday. More than 110 companies participated in the event, offering over 2,000 vacancies. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

HIGH HOPES VOICED FOR CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

Xi'an gathering to boost economic and trade collaboration

By XU WEI in Xi'an

indepth

Flour, edible oil and honey products from Kazakhstan have long been available at markets in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, offering the city's residents a range of choices to make their favorite steamed bread or *biangbiang* noodles.

Once the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, the city became an important market for produce from Kazakhstan after Xi'an Aiju Grain and Oil Industrial Group launched a series of projects to partner with farmers in Central Asia. The company is one of the main food processors and traders in Xi'an.

Liu Dongmeng, deputy general manager of the group, said the projects, inspired by the Belt and Road Initiative, have delivered win-win outcomes for Kazakh farmers, businesses and Chinese consumers.

"Through these projects, we have put better food on residents' tables in Shaanxi, in addition to helping growers in Central Asia put food on their own tables," he said.

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INSIDE

Taxidermist helps preserve natural legacy

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VISIT…

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CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

Summit: Business confidence bolstered

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Liu added that the company's projects in Kazakhstan have made it easier for local farmers to sell their produce at higher prices. They have also driven growth of the warehousing and transportation sectors, and created more than 1,100 jobs.

The group's projects in the Central Asian nation include an oil processing plant and orders to obtain produce from 100,000 hectares of wheat and oil crops. Together, they are just one of the many wide-ranging cooperation projects launched between China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

On Thursday and Friday, the heads of state of China and the five Central Asian countries are due to gather in Xi'an for the first China-Central Asia Summit. Many analysts and business leaders have voiced high expectations that the event will take economic and trade cooperation to a higher level and deliver more tangible benefits to people from the six nations.

Zhao Huirong, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, said the summit's priority is to advance economic and pragmatic cooperation, and establish platforms in various sectors to increase economic and trade cooperation.

She said the timing of the event is special, as this year marks the 10th anniversary of the BRI, and the past decade has witnessed stronger political mutual trust, enhanced security cooperation and exponential economic cooperation between China and Central Asia.

China has been the largest or main trading partner of Central Asian countries for years, and the total trade volume between China and the five nations reached a record $70 billion last year, data from China's National Development and Reform Commission show.

President Xi Jinping proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt, the forerunner of the BRI, in Central Asia. Beijing has signed cooperation agreements on jointly building the BRI with all five Central Asian countries, with Tajikistan being the first nation globally to sign such an agreement with China.

"While there is strong enthusiasm among China and the Central Asian countries for cooperation, problems still have to be resolved, and there is potential yet to be unleashed," Zhao said.

She highlighted the importance of the two sides further promoting trade and investment facilitation, ensuring the security of investments, and further refining the trade and investment structure.

Strong commitment

The gathering in Xi'an follows a virtual summit last year to mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations being established between China and the Central Asian countries. At this event, Xi announced a plan to provide grant assistance of $500 million to the five nations to support livelihood programs.

The two sides pledged at the virtual summit to build an even closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future to promote the nations' high-quality development and the region's prosperity and stability.

Last month, a meeting of foreign ministers from China and the Central Asian countries underlined interconnectivity as the priority for cooperation between the two sides and agreed to build a multidimensional and comprehensive network featuring the integration of roads, railways, airlines and ports.

The ministers also agreed to expand cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, agriculture, new energy and e-commerce, and to take steps to enable easier customs clearance and quarantine procedures in promoting trade facilitation.

Ivona Ladjevac, deputy director of the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, the Serbian capital, said Central Asia is a pivotal region for world peace and security, and is known for its huge deposits of natural gas, oil reserves and other mineral wealth.

The region has great potential for economic growth, and widening infrastructure links between the five landlocked countries and China will deliver win-win results, she said.

"There is no doubt that every effort will be put into building a closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future, which will contribute to regional and world peace, stability, development and prosperity," Ladjevac added.

Azamat Sulimanov, a researcher at the Institute for Strategic and Interregional Studies under the President of Uzbekistan, said unleashing transportation potential in Central Asia remains one of the top priorities for China and the five countries in bolstering their BRI cooperation.

He highlighted the significance of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway project in unleashing the potential for regional growth. During Xi's visit to Uzbekistan in September, the three nations signed a memorandum of understanding, or MOU, on cooperation in constructing the Kyrgyzstan section of the railway. They are scheduled to complete feasibility research on the rail link in the first half of this year, the MOU states.

Implementation of this project will significantly shorten the route from East Asia to countries in the Middle East and southern Europe by up to 900 kilometers, and the delivery time for goods by seven to eight days, Sulimanov said.

"This will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the growth of China's mutual trade with Central Asian countries, in particular with Uzbekistan," he said.

Rising optimism

The summit between China and the Central Asian countries has also bolstered confidence among businesses to further explore market potential.

Wang Wentao, China's minister of commerce, said at a meeting with the ministers of economy and trade from the five countries last month that China's direct investment in Central Asia reached $15 billion by the end of last year.

"We have jointly implemented a number of cooperation projects on oil, gas and mining, processing and manufacturing, and connectivity and digital technology, which have brought tangible benefits to the people of these countries," he said.

Nafis Samatova, a document manager for a wind power project being built by China Energy INTL Group CAS CO in Uzbekistan, said he is glad he joined the project, "as it provides a valuable opportunity for sharing experience and knowledge".

"The project is crucial for my country's development, because it promotes renewable energy sources and reduces dependence on fossil fuels. Moreover, it provides job opportunities for local people and contributes to the economic growth of the region, creating around 500 positions during the construction phase," he said.

Benedikt Sobotka, chief executive of Eurasian Resources Group, in which the Kazakh government holds a 40 percent stake, said he expects the China-Central Asia Summit to enhance joint projects between all parties, "with the aim of extracting further synergies and increasing regional prosperity".

"It is a real milestone in the history of the development of relations between China and Central Asian countries," he said.

Sobotka added that his company has strong ties with Chinese stakeholders, with a significant portfolio of joint ventures, and China is also a highly important strategic market and key sales destination for more than one-third of its total sales volume.

The BRI enables greater access to markets across Central and East Asia, allows for increased trade volumes, and more effectively connects Central Asian countries with global markets, further enhancing trade and prosperity, he said.

Liu, from Xi'an Aiju Grain and Oil Industrial Group, said the company is looking to further diversify its product categories in trade with Central Asia.

He said the group's agricultural cooperation project, which facilitated imports of high-quality produce from Central Asia, also helped China strengthen its food security and diversify its sources of agricultural imports.

"The upgrading of ties between China and Central Asia has paved the way for our transformation from a domestic company to a global food processor and trader," he said.

"We will definitely try to seize this opportunity, improve our capacity in conducting trade, and build up our presence in Central Asia."

From top: A road is built by Chinese constructors in Kyrgyzstan; drilling machines work at an oil plant in Uzbekistan; workers check a well dug by Chinese engineers in Kyrgyzstan. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

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Left: Visitors to an expo in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, are attracted by fruit from Tajikistan. ZOU JINGYI / XINHUA **Center:** Farmers in Kazakhstan, who partner with Xi'an Aiju Grain and Oil Industrial Group, harvest wheat that can be made into *biangbiang* noodles. XINHUA **Right:** Workers monitor production at a petrochemical plant in Uzbekistan, which has attracted investment from Chinese companies. XINHUA

Kazakhstan student embraces a decade of life in China

By XU WEI and LIU HAO

After living in China for 10 years, Sayat Kalimoldanov now considers himself to be half-Chinese, having witnessed the nation's phenomenal digital transformation during this time.

Sayat Kalimoldanov

"When I first arrived in China, WeChat and Alipay were just starting to become popular. Now, the services offered by internet giants have infiltrated every corner of Chinese society, making life for everyone so much easier," he said.

Kalimoldanov, 28, a Kazakh citizen, is now pursuing a doctorate in international relations at Shanghai International Studies University.

He said his experience in China has made him fully aware that his home nation should learn more from its neighbor, and he also hopes to bring investment projects from China to Kazakhstan.

"What I have gained most from my experience here is that I have grown as an individual together with the development of China as a nation," he said.

Kalimoldanov first visited China after finishing high school in 2011, when he barely spoke any Chinese. Despite this disadvantage, he was impressed with the hospitality and kindness of Chinese people and the excellent facilities at the nation's higher education institutions.

He studied business Mandarin at Xinjiang Normal University in 2012, before pursuing a master's in diplomacy and a doctorate in international relations at Shanghai International Studies University.

Over the years, he has not only increased his proficiency in Chinese, but also found a home in Shanghai, where he now has a wide circle of friends, ranging from sales clerks to business leaders.

Kalimoldanov is determined to pursue a career as a diplomat for his country and serve as a bridge for communications between Kazakhstan and China. "I feel that I still have so much to learn in China, and hope I can use what I have learned here back in my home country," he said.

During his time in China, Kalimoldanov has also discovered the thrills of traditional dragon boat racing, which boasts a history of more than 2,000 years.

He has taken part in races organized by his college for the past four years and he hopes to organize a competition on rivers in his hometown of Almaty.

Kalimoldanov said he was excited to learn that China and Kazakhstan will introduce a visa-free regime allowing citizens from both countries stays of up to 30 days. He said the policy will enable people from the two nations to better understand each other.

"Many Kazakh people barely have any knowledge of China, and I hope they have the opportunity to see the country with their own eyes someday," he said.

"My mother also knows little about China, even though I have been in the country for more than a decade. She was surprised to hear it is safe here, even if I go out at 2 am or 3 am. I hope she will have the opportunity to experience the charm of Shanghai and the hospitality of its people."

Kalimoldanov also has high expectations for the China-Central Asia Summit this week.

"One of my favorite sayings is that the rise of the East started with the rise of China. Successful strong relations between China and Central Asia over the past 31 years lie in mutual respect and win-win cooperation.

"China has always sought harmony and peace, and that is why people from Central Asia look forward to the summit and hope it will deliver more results."

CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

Xi's seven stories of binding friendship

President shares touching accounts of exchanges between peoples

China and Central Asian countries, which began interactions through the ancient Silk Road more than 2,000 years ago, have enjoyed steady political and economic ties, as well as a tradition of friendly exchanges between their peoples.

President Xi Jinping, through his speeches, remarks and signed articles, has shared with the public the many touching stories of people-to-people exchanges between both sides. The following are accounts of the exchanges, and what later happened to some of the people.

Dancers perform the Kirgiz epic *Manas* at the National Theater of the China Ethnic Song and Dance Ensemble on March 18 in Beijing. CAI YANG / XINHUA

1. Xian Xinghai Boulevard — from Xi's speech at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan, on Sept 7, 2013

The boulevard in the ancient city of Almaty, Kazakhstan, is named after Xian Xinghai, a renowned Chinese composer.

Xian traveled to Moscow in 1940 to score a documentary about the Eighth Route Army in Yan'an, Shaanxi province, the then revolutionary base of the Communist Party of China. But his work was interrupted in 1941, when the Great Patriotic War broke out.

Xian wanted to return to China, but his attempts were thwarted. Stricken by poverty and disease, Xian found his way to Almaty in 1942, where he met Kazakh composer Bakhitzhan Baykadamov.

Baykadamov took Xian in, let Xian stay at his sister's home and shared rationed food with the Chinese musician.

During his stay in Almaty, Xian composed the symphonies *Liberation of the Nation*, *Sacred War*, *Red All over the River* and *Amangeldy*, a piece created in honor of a Kazakh national hero.

In 1999, Almaty named a boulevard after Xian, and erected a monument to honor him to mark the friendship between the peoples of China and Kazakhstan.

2. Reunion after five decades — from Xi's speech at Nazarbayev University in Astana on Sept 7, 2013

Li Yuankang was born in the late 1940s to a Chinese man and a woman from the former Soviet Union.

His parents fell in love when they were working in what is today the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. They married and gave birth to Li and his elder sister.

Li and his family lived together in China until 1955, when Li's mother took his elder sister with her and returned to her home country.

Eager to see his mother again, Li tried every means possible to find her.

His efforts paid off in 2009, when they finally met. It turned out that his mother was living in Almaty, Kazakhstan. At the time, Li was 61 and his mother was 80.

"The happiness that came half a century late is a powerful witness to the friendliness between the peoples of China and Kazakhstan," Xi said.

3. Rare blood donor — from Xi's speech at Nazarbayev University in Astana on Sept 7, 2013

Since 2009, when he came to Hainan province to study, Ruslan Tulenov from Kazakhstan has been donating rare Rh-negative blood twice a year to save lives.

After graduating from Hainan University in 2015, Tulenov began studying for his master's degree in Beijing. He completed his postgraduate study in 2018. Having witnessed China grow by leaps and bounds over the years, he decided to find a job and remain in the country.

In 2019, Tulenov became the first foreign staff member of the Hainan Provincial Bureau of International Economic Development.

In April 2022, Tulenov had the opportunity to introduce his work to Xi during the president's visit to Hainan. Xi called Tulenov "an old China hand", and welcomed more global talent to come to Hainan.

4. Precious horse breed — from Xi's remarks at the International Akhal-Teke Horses Association Special Conference and China Horse Culture Festival on May 12, 2014, in Beijing

Akhal-Teke, a world-renowned fine horse breed, is native to and the pride of Turkmenistan. The horse has become a messenger of and witness to the lasting friendship between the peoples of the two countries.

Chinese people love Akhal-Tekes, which arrived in China along the ancient Silk Road more than 2,000 years ago.

Akhal-Teke is called *hanxuema* or *hanxuebaoma* in Chinese, which means "horse that sweats blood", and is valued for its metallic-looking coat, speed and endurance. In China, the horse was first recorded in *Shiji*, or the Historical Records, written by Chinese historian Sima Qian.

Since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1992, Turkmenistan has sent several of the horses to China as state gifts.

5. Manas epic — from Xi's signed article published in Kyrgyzstan on June 11, 2019

In an article signed by Xi, published ahead of a state visit to Kyrgyzstan, the president mentioned an opera the China National Opera House was going to perform in Kyrgyzstan.

The opera, sung in Chinese, is based on the epic tale of Manas, a chieftain of the Kirgiz people.

The performance allows the cultural treasure shared by people in both China and Kyrgyzstan to shine brilliantly once again, and strikes a strong note on the traditional friendliness between the two countries, Xi wrote.

Listed as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO, Manas is a treasure of Kirgiz culture and one of the three major heroic epics of China's ethnic minority groups. Containing stories about Manas and his offspring, the epic is very popular in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and some Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan.

6. Foreigner, but not an outsider — from Xi's speech at the virtual summit commemorating the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Central Asian countries on Jan 25, 2022

Ismail Daurov came from Kazakhstan to study in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in 2013, and spent nine years in the city.

He was known for actively volunteering for the COVID-19 response in Xi'an at the end of 2021, when he was studying for his master's degree at the Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine.

Daurov's words — "I am a foreigner, but I am not an outsider" — touched the hearts of many in China, Xi said.

Daurov, also known by his Chinese name Ma Wenxuan, gained his master's degree and now runs a clinic in Kazakhstan.

Primary school students visit in June 2022 the Xinjiang Ancient Ecological Park in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, which hosts the largest Akhal-Teke horse base in the country. The rare breed is native to Turkmenistan and the horses are known for their speed, endurance, intelligence and sleek coat. WANG FEI / XINHUA

7. The ophthalmologist — from Xi's signed article published on the Kazakhstanskaya Pravda newspaper on Sept 13, 2022

In the signed article published ahead of his state visit to Kazakhstan, Xi mentioned the story of Saulebek Kabilbekov, an ophthalmologist from Kazakhstan, to demonstrate the deep friendship between the peoples of China and Kazakhstan.

Kabilbekov, who went to Daqing Ophthalmology Hospital in 1998 to provide technical assistance at the invitation of the hospital, worked there for 24 years and treated nearly 200,000 Chinese patients.

A versatile expert, Kabilbekov was the first to conduct several types of eye surgeries, including posterior scleral reinforcement, in the city of Daqing, Heilongjiang province, according to the hospital.

Called "Doctor Bieke" by local people, Kabilbekov has traveled across the western regions of Heilongjiang, providing free diagnosis and treatment for farmers, giving lectures to other medical workers and promoting eye hygiene knowledge among students.

CHINA DAILY- XINHUA

Journalists watch for concrete outcomes

By **XU WEI** and **MO JINGXI** in Xi'an

Xi'an in Shaanxi province, an ancient city that was once the capital of 13 Chinese dynasties, is making international headlines as it welcomes journalists from media outlets worldwide looking to capture the global implications of the China-Central Asia Summit.

According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, about 300 reporters from Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America will cover the two-day summit, starting on Thursday, which is set to bring together the heads of state of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Some of these journalists have expressed their keen interest to know how the summit will enhance solidarity between China and Central Asia, and lead to concrete outcomes for pragmatic cooperation.

Valeriy Surganov, a journalist from Kazakhstan, said he expects the visa-free regime, which China and Kazakhstan have agreed to launch, to bring the peoples of the two countries closer. The agreement will allow Chinese citizens to stay in Kazakhstan without a visa for up to 30 calendar days and vice versa.

Another favorable factor for the relationship between China and Kazakhstan is that Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev studied in China, knows the country very well and attaches great importance to ties with Beijing, Surganov said.

The summit will also lead to heightened dialogue and communication between China and Central Asia, and deliver more tangible benefits from their win-win cooperation, he added.

Andrew Hayley, from Reuters, said he was keen to know how the summit would promote energy cooperation between China and Central Asia, which has long been known for its rich natural gas and oil reserves.

"China is a major importer of crude oil and natural gas in the world, while Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are major energy exporters. The energy cooperation between the two sides will have major implications on the global energy market. That is why it has grabbed our attention," he said.

Saud Faisal Malik, editor-in-chief of Observer Diplomat magazine in Pakistan, said the timing of the event in Xi'an is important because the participating countries are set to mark the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative.

He said he would be looking for updates from the six countries' leaders on the BRI and their stand on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Alain Mazada, a journalist from Cameroon, said his purpose of covering the summit is to show his readers the global implications of the summit between China and Central Asia.

The world is linked, and what is happening in China may involve a citizen who is in the far north of Cameroon, or one who is in Morocco, or in Russia, he said. "I am interested in showing through this summit the ways and means set in motion to revive the economies of the world, especially in developing countries."

Contact the writers at xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

Ties: Tokayev receives birthday wish

From page 1

During their talks, Xi wished the Kazakh president a happy birthday, saying that his state visit to China on this special occasion spoke volumes for the high level of bilateral relations and again proved the Kazakh president's strong bond with China.

He noted that the two nations, as trustworthy friends, brothers and partners to each other, are at a critical stage of development and rejuvenation.

Xi underlined the need for the two sides to carry forward their traditional friendship, offer each other steadfast support, closely align development strategies, advance win-win cooperation and build a community with a shared future defined by lasting friendship, a high degree of mutual trust and sharing weal and woe.

He pledged Beijing's firm support to the Kazakh side in upholding national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and following a path of development that suits its own national conditions.

The two nations should strengthen interconnectivity and expand cooperation on e-commerce, innovation, big data and other emerging sectors, Xi said.

He urged quicker steps from both sides to establish cultural centers in each other's country and to use the introduction of a visa-free regime to promote people-to-people exchanges.

Xi also said he welcomes Kazakhstan hosting events in China over the next year to encourage Chinese tourists to visit the Central Asian country, adding that he believes the establishment of the country's consulate-general in Xi'an will help promote bilateral cooperation at local levels.

He called for stronger bilateral cooperation and exchanges among media outlets to better tell the stories of friendship between the two countries.

He explained that the China-Central Asia Summit will be a milestone and usher in a new era of cooperation between China and the five Central Asian countries.

Xi expressed readiness to work together with the five countries to make the China-Central Asia mechanism a key platform for in-depth cooperation among the six countries.

Tokayev said that China holds a position of particular importance in his country's foreign policy, and the bilateral relations are built upon a profound friendship and solid mutual trust.

Kazakhstan is willing to work with China to strengthen their permanent comprehensive strategic partnership and expand cooperation on trade, tourism, people-to-people exchanges and at local levels, he said.

Tokayev expressed delight over the two countries' agreement to establish a visa-free regime, which he said will promote bilateral exchanges.

The joint building of the Belt and Road is a great initiative, and Kazakhstan will continue to actively take part in it, said Tokayev, who also spoke highly of the significance of the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative proposed by the Chinese president.

Kazakhstan is willing to work with China to make full use of the China-Central Asia mechanism to jointly promote regional security, stability and growth, he said.

Shaanxi: Province urged to play bigger role in BRI drive

From page 1

Xi called for advancing green and low-carbon development, and promoting high-quality ecological conservation.

While stressing the importance of expanding opening-up, Xi urged Shaanxi to play a bigger role in Belt and Road cooperation, and actively participate in the construction of a new western land-sea corridor, through which products from western China are continuously going global, and high-quality goods from overseas are also entering the Chinese market.

It is important to give full play to Xi'an's role as a hub for the China-Europe Railway Express to make it an important window of opening-up to countries in Central Asia, South Asia and West Asia, and allow it to play a bigger role in the nation's "dual-circulation" paradigm, Xi said.

As the CPC is carrying out a Party-wide thematic education campaign to study and implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the general secretary urged Party organizations of Shaanxi province to fully understand the Thought and make concrete achievements through the theoretical study program.

On his way to Shaanxi, Xi inspected Yuncheng in Shanxi province, urging efforts in ecological conservation of the Yellow River basin and the protection of cultural relics.

CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA SUMMIT

Cartoon faces

An ink and wash artist (right) paints a caricature of Tanitshah Suraya Kirton, a journalist from Suriname, on a traditional folding fan in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Tuesday, as the China-Central Asia Summit News Center is launched. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Agricultural ties produce big yields

Trade of farm products, technology between partner countries expands

By LI LEI
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Agricultural partnerships, ranging from farm produce to the sharing of farming know-how, have expanded between China and Central Asian countries over the past 30 years, officials and experts said.

China has signed a number of agreements with Central Asian counterparts, and collaborated in fields such as locust control and horse rearing, said Li Hongtao, deputy director of the international economic cooperation division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Chinese research institutes, such as the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, have formed lasting ties with Central Asian partners. They've created joint labs, and have achieved progress in animal husbandry, veterinary medicine, cotton farming and dryland agriculture, among many other fields, he said at an agricultural forum in Qingdao, Shandong province, in February.

"The trade volume of farm produce between China and the five Central Asian countries has increased year by year, from $175 million in 1992 to $1.073 billion in 2021," he said, referring to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Yuan Rui, director of the agricultural bureau in Qingdao, said the city was involved in a series of modern agricultural cooperation projects with the five countries. Those include the building of soybean, alfalfa and other crops and animal husbandry bases in Kazakhstan, creating an economic seedling base in Uzbekistan, and signing a cooperation memorandum between Shandong Port and Kazakhstan to promote cross-border trade.

"Based on the good foundation of Shandong's agriculture, we are actively exploring new models of modern agricultural cooperation such as 'overseas ranches' with the five Central Asian countries," he told the forum.

Central Asia, with vast tracts of unplowed land, has attracted Chinese investors in recent years.

As of the end of 2021, China's agricultural investments in the five Central Asian countries amounted to nearly $400 million, employing nearly 3,000 local employees, official figures showed.

Cooperation projects in wheat flour and vegetable oil processing, cattle and sheep breeding and slaughter, cotton planting, and textile manufacturing have contributed to local agricultural development and have been a boon to bilateral trade.

For example, Kyrgyzstan, where agriculture takes up a large part of its GDP, exports a variety of agricultural products to China, including cherries, melons, flour, dairy products, horses and honey.

According to Comnews.cn, a news website endorsed by the Ministry of Commerce, the bilateral trade volume of agricultural products between Kazakhstan and China last year doubled from the previous year, reaching $783 million, of which Kazakhstan's exports to China reached $553 million, an increase of 2.2 times year-on-year.

The main agricultural products exported to China include sunflower seed oil, flaxseed, sunflower seeds, bran, rapeseed oil, barley and other oil crops, it said.

A research institute built by China and Uzbekistan as part of the Belt and Road Initiative projects has produced a super cotton variety, which has doubled cotton yields with just one-third of irrigation water needed compared with local varieties.

Transport links boost communication with Central Asian nations

By LUO WANGSHU
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Regular scheduled flights between Xi'an, capital of Northwest China's Shaanxi province, and Astana, capital of Kazakhstan, began last month. The flights, operated by Air China, run every Monday and Friday.

The opening of the Xi'an-Astana direct route will open up a more convenient air channel between China and Central Asia, expanding the international air network, boosting opening-up and helping more companies "go global", according to Air China.

"The opening of the flight is because of the practical need for exchanges between China and Kazakhstan," said Zhang Sheng, vice-president of Air China.

He noted that it will promote exchanges and cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, culture and tourism between the countries, contributing to the development of their aviation markets and the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative.

"The route will enable more young people from Central Asia to learn about China from all aspects. They can visit Xi'an and jointly help the city build into an international metropolis," said Epke Ehy, a student from Gumilyov Eurasian National University in Kazakhstan.

This month, two more international routes from Xi'an to other Central Asian countries were scheduled to be launched, expanding the air network between China and Central Asia, according to the city's development and reform commission.

"In 1992, when I went to Kazakhstan for business, I had to take a train from Xi'an to Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and then transfer to an international train to Almaty, Kazakhstan. The trip took two to three days," Ji Yanwei, chairman of the Shaanxi Chamber of Commerce in Central Asia, told Xi'an Daily.

Now the direct flight takes less than six hours from Xi'an to Astana.

Last month, the first dedicated freight train carrying new energy vehicles between Xi'an and Tashkent transported more than 260 new energy vehicles to the Uzbek capital. The trip took 12 days.

Also last month, a freight train carrying more than 700 metric tons of walnuts and walnut processing equipment left Shangluo, Shaanxi province, and headed to Samarkand, a major city in Uzbekistan. The journey took about eight days.

"Thanks to the freight train, we can sell walnuts to Central Asia and Europe," Wu Yanliang, a manager from Changsheng Agricultural Corp in Shangluo city, told Shaanxi TV.

According to China Railway Xi'an Group, the regional railway operator, Xi'an has opened 17 major freight rail routes between the city and Central Asian countries.

In the first quarter of this year, more than 1,100 freight trains between China and Europe left Xi'an, a year-on-year increase of 40 percent.

Last year, 4,639 such trains were operated, up more than 20 percent year-on-year.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

China Exim Bank helps pave way for Belt and Road Initiative to blossom

By HAO NAN
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Supporting China's foreign trade, investment and international economic cooperation, the Export-Import Bank of China, also known as the China Exim Bank, has promoted the high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asia for years.

It has also facilitated economic integration between China and Central Asian countries to achieve common development.

The bank has carried out financial cooperation with Central Asian countries for more than 20 years, during which it has financed a large number of projects in the fields of transportation, power, chemicals and water conservancy.

They include nine modern factories across different sectors, 17 power stations with a total installed capacity of nearly 1 million kilowatts, roads built in several countries with a total length exceeding 3,000 kilometers, and 1,500 km of power lines.

The Export-Import Bank of China supports the construction of a railway tunnel in Uzbekistan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

These livelihood projects have helped to improve the social well-being of people. In Kazakhstan, for example, the China Exim Bank financed the establishment of the country's first and so far only electrolytic aluminum plant in Pavlodar.

Most of the equipment in the plant was purchased from China. It adopted the world's most advanced technologies at that time, and reached the world-class level in such aspects as environmental protection, occupational health and construction safety.

The plant is honored by the local people as "a bright pearl inlaid in the beautiful grasslands of Kazakhstan".

The bank also supported Kyrgyzstan to rebuild the Osh-Sary Tash-Irkeshtam Road, part of the 959-km China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan international road.

The section linking China and Kyrgyzstan played an important role on the ancient Silk Road, but was seriously damaged due to natural disasters over the past century.

The project allows the international road to resume full connectivity, which has greatly shortened freight journey times among China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and injected new impetus into the economic and trade exchanges among the three countries and with their neighbors.

In Tajikistan, the bank financed a Chinese company to set up 500-kilovolt transportation and transmission lines to integrate the country's northern and southern power grid systems.

Since Tajikistan is a mountainous country, laying the power lines needed to cross two snow-capped mountains, each with an altitude of more than 3,500 meters. Chinese workers overcame many difficulties and completed the project one year ahead of schedule.

The integration of the country's power grids has solved the imbalance of power supply between the northern and southern areas, alleviating winter power shortages in the northern area and helping Tajikistan export electricity to neighboring countries in the summer.

Reconstruction of the Osh-Sary Tash-Irkeshtam Road, part of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan road, is supported by the Export-Import Bank of China.

Another BRI-related model project financed by the China Exim Bank is the 19.2-km Kamchiq Tunnel, which is known as the longest tunnel in Central Asia.

The tunnel, built along the Angren-Pap electrified railway line, connects the remote Fergana region of Uzbekistan with the capital Tashkent, as well as the central and western industrial areas.

It has ended the long tradition of local people having to make a detour through neighboring countries while traveling domestically. It now takes only 15 minutes by train to travel through the Qurama Mountains.

Construction of the tunnel was challenging due to the complex geological environment, including a rock burst zone that stretches over 10 km. Rock burst means the violent expulsion of rock resulting from heavy pressure on brittle rock layer, the most serious of which caused a partial collapse of the tunnel.

With hard work and wisdom, Chinese workers finished building the tunnel in just 900 days.

In Turkmenistan, the oil and gas industry used to have insufficient production capacity. Local companies have imported a series of oil and gas equipment such as workover rigs from China with the support of the China Exim Bank.

The new equipment is helping Turkmenistan optimize the production and operation of oil- and gas-drilling fields; improve infrastructure construction; strengthen the capacity and efficiency in natural gas exploitation; and promote the development of the country's energy economy.

At the same time, the procurement has boosted China's export of relevant equipment and technologies, and deepened energy cooperation between China and Turkmenistan.

The implementation of these major projects has not only solved the urgent problems faced by these countries but promoted industrialization and modernization, and injected strong impetus into local economic and social development, bringing good social benefits, according to the bank.

In addition to financing landmark projects, the China Exim Bank has supported the construction of "small and beautiful" projects.

These include the renovation of pump stations in Uzbekistan and the development of a traffic automation management system in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan.

These projects have also helped to enhance the sense of gain, satisfaction and identity of people in Central Asian countries.

The upcoming China-Central Asia Summit, which is set to take place in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on May 18 and 19, will elevate ties between China and Central Asian countries, bring economic and trade cooperation to a higher level and deliver more tangible benefits to the people, officials said.

Looking ahead, the China Exim Bank will continue to discuss cooperation, share opportunities and seek common development with Central Asian countries.

It will promote the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative across Central Asia with better financial services, and contribute to the building of an even closer community with a shared future for mankind.

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Cooperation expands trade ties

Digital technology new investment pattern between China, Central Asian countries

By ZHONG NAN

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Visitors learn about local specialty products at the Uzbekistan exhibition area during the Sixth Silk Road International Expo in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Aug 14, 2022. LI YIBO / XINHUA

China and five Central Asian countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — are set to enhance their economic and trade ties by expanding cooperation in new areas such as digital technologies, green development and trade in services, experts and business executives said.

The six countries have been deepening pragmatic cooperation in economics and trade for the past three decades, establishing comprehensive, energetic and mutually beneficial partnerships in sectors including energy, natural resources, infrastructure and agriculture, according to China's Ministry of Commerce.

With China and these Central Asian countries accelerating the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and reinforcing ties in areas of common interests, such as manufacturing, transport, finance and telecommunications, experts said these moves will expand economic cooperation — from trade and investment activities mainly engaged in energy and natural resource-related industries — to more fields.

Bai Ming, deputy director of international market research at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said that as digital trade has emerged as a new engine to fuel economic growth, it is able to effectively connect trade chains' information nodes, reducing information asymmetries and transaction costs between China and Central Asian countries.

Central Asian countries have followed the trend of digital development and deepened regional economic cooperation in fields such as smart cities, telemedicine and advanced manufacturing over the past several years, Bai said.

For example, Huawei Technologies has already participated in smart city-themed digital infrastructure projects in Uzbekistan and built digital transportation projects in cities in Tajikistan.

The collaboration of all involved parties in digital infrastructure development, sustainable growth and trade in services will pave the way for mutually advantageous cooperation, fostering an environment of widespread consultation, collective contribution and inclusive rewards in the partnership between China and the Central Asian region, said Wang Shoujun, dean of the Belt and Road School of Beijing Normal University.

Thanks to factors such as the tangible growth of the Belt and Road Initiative and the complementary trade structures, trade between China and the five Central Asian countries reached a record $70.2 billion last year, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Such a good momentum has also been sustained this year, with bilateral trade soaring 37.4 percent year-on-year in the first four months of 2023, according to China's General Administration of Customs.

Crude oil, natural gas, minerals and agricultural products are Central Asian countries' main shipments to China. China exports mainly manufacturing equipment, steel, vehicles, electronics, textiles, garments and household appliances to these countries.

By the end of last year, China's direct investment stock in the five Central Asian countries had reached nearly $15 billion, with a number of cooperation projects launched in fields such as oil and gas exploration and processing, manufacturing, regional connectivity and digital technologies.

In a video-link meeting between the six countries' economic and trade ministers held in April, China's Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao said that China is willing to work with all sides to promote new patterns in trade and investment, pursue innovation as a development impetus, keep industrial and supply chains in the region secure and stable, and uphold the multilateral trading system.

Cross-regional flow of gas to increase

By ZHENG XIN

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Natural gas delivered through the China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline from Central Asia to China is expected to pick up as construction of a fourth pipeline is proceeding in full swing, according to operator China National Petroleum Corporation.

The company has been actively negotiating with various partners to accelerate the construction of the D-line project of the China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline which, with a designed gas transmission capacity of 30 billion cubic meters per year, will pass through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and form a gas pipeline network together with the already completed A, B and C lines of the China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline.

The current A, B and C lines pass through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, with a designed gas transmission capacity of 55 billion cubic meters per year, the CNPC said.

Oil and gas resources from Central Asia will play a significant role in China's energy security supply system, and China's strengthened energy cooperation with Central Asian countries will also provide a large number of job opportunities for gas-source countries, as well as countries along the pipeline, the company said.

Figures from the CNPC revealed that the China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline supplied 42 billion cubic meters of natural gas to China last year, and the pipeline currently transports around 100 million cubic meters of natural gas per day.

By the end of last year, it had delivered a total of 423 billion cubic meters of natural gas to China since its opening in 2009, providing gas for more than 500 million residents in 27 provincial-level regions and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, it said.

According to the CNPC, Central Asian countries are among the first with which the company started oil and gas cooperation.

With CNPC's technological advantages, oil and gas exploration in Central Asia have achieved major breakthroughs during the past few years, which not only diversified the energy exports of Central Asian countries but also ensured domestic energy security in China, it said.

The company vows to continuously step up cooperation in the energy sector with Central Asian countries, from traditional to renewable energies, as well as technological equipment manufacturing, it said.

The Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline, China's first direct oil import pipeline enabling oil imports from Central Asia, had delivered around 250 million metric tons of crude oil to China by the end of last year since it opened in 2006, it said.

An analyst said the gas and crude transmission pipelines between Central Asia and China are important strategic energy channels for China, a major oil and gas consumer and importer on the global stage.

While Central Asian countries are rich in oil and gas, cooperation between the two parties shares complementary advantages of resources and markets with broad development prospects, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Lin believes cooperation between the two parties in the energy sector will continue to expand in the years to come, as domestic energy companies have been actively participating in the planning and construction of the energy and power sector in recent years.

From left: Students attend the first PHBS International Cultural Day. PHBS graduates are from different countries. Students attend an academic seminar. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

PHBS establishing reputation as a new force in global higher education

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Higher education in today's globalized world has become highly competitive. Over the past decade, China has established itself as an economic powerhouse and a rising force in higher education.

While Beijing has long been recognized as the hub of higher education, a growing number of universities across other regions are rising in the rankings. Take southern China, for example, where options for top-quality education are emerging.

As one of the country's flagship universities, Peking University has gained much momentum in the last five years, as has its newest business school, Peking University HSBC Business School. Located in Shenzhen, PHBS was founded in 2004 with the vision to build on Peking University's inspirational traditions and develop a center of international excellence in business education.

"Right now, joining PHBS must be one of the coolest things that students can do if they are interested in China," said André Georgi from Germany. Now working at Boston Consulting Group, one of the Big Three strategy consulting firms, Georgi earned his master's degree in management.

His insights echo the sentiments of many students who frequently cite opportunities in China, seeking to leverage their experience here to excel in today's business world. "PHBS has multiple unique traits which make it different from other schools, including culture, location, professors, and networking opportunities. That's why we all love it!" said Anton Ergahsev, a management student from Tajikistan.

Global presence

According to the QS Business Master's Rankings 2023, the Master in Finance and Master in Management programs at PHBS were ranked in the global top 20 for their respective subject areas.

These rankings evaluate over 600 programs from more than 40 countries to identify the best graduate master's programs worldwide.

PHBS has received multiple accreditations since 2011, further proving the quality of its education. The school was accredited by AACSB in 2018 and AMBA in 2019, the two largest and most influential business school accreditation organizations, after having previously received EPAS accreditation from the European Foundation for Management Development in 2011 for its Master in Economics program.

During Peking University's 120th anniversary year in 2018, PHBS opened its campus in Boars Hill, Oxfordshire, England, offering students the chance to engage in cross-border study. The program enables students to spend one year studying in the United Kingdom and another year at PHBS Shenzhen, providing them with international values and experiences. The program is a significant plus for business practitioners and international students who want to explore global market niches whilst utilizing entrepreneurship in China. Moreover, PHBS students benefit from an extensive alumni network spanning over 70 locations worldwide, fostering valuable connections and friendships.

PHBS Building.

Talent powerhouse

Powered by exceptional faculty from the world's leading universities, PHBS now offers over 130 graduate-level courses each year tailored to provide domestic and overseas students with immersive Chinese educational experiences and a global outlook. Georgi said: "This really helped me develop a much broader understanding of the world, combining my Western and Chinese views."

As technology shapes the business landscape, universities worldwide have begun to incorporate fintech into their curricula, and PHBS has followed suit. "It's a natural step," said PHBS associate professor Jaehyuk Choi.

Choi made a career shift in 2016, leaving his "quant" job at Goldman Sachs to join PHBS teaching blockchain and machine learning in the fintech program. He also believes that "since PHBS is located in Shenzhen, we can prepare students to know more about tech firms and develop must-have skills related to AI and ML. Leveraging its location, I think PHBS and Shenzhen will grow together in a similar way as Stanford University and Silicon Valley have."

With such momentum, PHBS is like a magnet attracting global talent. It now has more than 80 exceptional professors, all leaders in their respective fields with close ties to business. Notably, Nobel Laureate in Economics Thomas Sargent joined in 2017 to set up the Sargent Institute of Quantitative Economics and Finance. Possessing learning and research experience from the world's leading universities, PHBS faculty have the ability to guide research-led student-centered learning and engage in high-impact research.

Consequently, PHBS's reputation in terms of talent cultivation and employability has grown exponentially. Its graduates continue to stand out in the fiercely job market, with their employment rate bucking the trend of the past three years.

Diverse opportunities

Turkish entrepreneur Erdi Tac found that the most important lessons he learned at PHBS were not only in the classroom, but also through diverse opportunities such as company visits that deepen students' understanding of real-world business practice.

PHBS is taking advantage of Shenzhen's reputation as a hub for China's entrepreneurial companies by regularly inviting entrepreneurs and business leaders from well-known Shenzhen-based companies, such as Huawei and Tencent, to share their insights with students. In the era of unprecedented change, PHBS also holds high-level forums featuring renowned experts and scholars to analyze domestic and global economic trends, new challenges and new opportunities.

David Hall, one of the first international students to graduate from the MBA program, returned to Shenzhen because of the abundant opportunities it offers, saying: "Technology in China is unbelievable and being in Shenzhen allowed me to see it firsthand." Before joining PHBS, he had worked for three years at a top investment bank. For Rosalyn Jeon, a Cornell and PHBS graduate from South Korea, found that the school helped her gain much-needed insights and awareness into the dynamics of China's economy.

PHBS' entrepreneurial vision continues with the establishment of the Qianhai Institute of China-Britain, which brings together top resources from the world's leading universities to promote international exchanges and cooperation.

By leveraging advantages of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the institute aims to become a cutting-edge academic research platform with global impact, an incubator for innovation and entrepreneurship, and a high-level think tank for policymakers and practitioners.

With such diverse resources and entrepreneurial roadmap, PHBS is ready to empower its students to excel inside and outside the classroom, equipping them with the capabilities as well as connections to succeed in global business and become future leaders. Relying on the dynamic and pioneering spirit of a thriving city, the school presents an exceptional opportunity to benefit from both modern Asian cultural immersion and internationalization.

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Regional bonds remain robust, continue to grow

Since ancient times, neighbors have always worked together

By MO JINGXI in Xi'an
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Ever since the ancient Silk Road was opened up after imperial envoy Zhang Qian's expedition to the Western Regions, the easternmost portion of today's Central Asia, cooperation between Xi'an and Central Asian countries has been consistent and growing in terms of trade, agriculture, energy and many other areas.

Such bonds were strengthened on Thursday when a direct flight between Xi'an and Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe was opened. The ancient capital of China has become the first Chinese city connected by air with all five Central Asian countries with a total of 11 airlines operating flights every week.

"The number of airlines will continue to grow in the future to meet the needs for trade and investment activities," Ye Niuping, acting mayor of Xi'an, told reporters at a news conference on Wednesday.

Founded some 3,100 years ago, Xi'an, which is today the capital of Shaanxi province, served as the Chinese capital for 13 dynasties. During its heyday in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), when it was known as Chang'an, the city attracted a significant influx of foreign merchants, envoys and students from various countries.

During the Tang Dynasty, numerous scholars and poets visited the then Chang'an, seeking literary discussions, camaraderie and poetic indulgence.

Ye, also vice-governor of Shaanxi province, said Shaanxi has given full play to its geopolitical strengths and serves as a business and logistics hub facing Central Asian countries, particularly since President Xi Jinping put forward the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013.

> "We have benefitted from the dividends of common development with Central Asian countries under the framework of the BRI and we will continue to enhance investment and trade exchanges with Central Asian countries."
>
> **Ye Niuping,** acting mayor of Xi'an

According to Ye, trade volume between Shaanxi and Central Asian countries last year reached 2.08 billion yuan ($297 million). By the end of last year, 18 enterprises from Shaanxi had invested a total of $820 million into Central Asian countries, accounting for 15 percent of Shaanxi's outbound foreign investment.

"We have benefitted from the dividends of common development with Central Asian countries under the framework of the BRI and we will continue to enhance investment and trade exchanges with Central Asian countries so as to make greater contributions to the high-quality development of the Belt and Road," Ye said.

Home to a number of world-renowned historical sites, including the Bell Tower and the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, Xi'an has 159 museums and attracts over 30 million visitors each year.

People-to-people exchanges are a highlight of the cooperation with Central Asian countries, with more than 1,000 young people from these countries currently studying in Shaanxi.

With scholarships provided by local governments, the students are majoring in business management, engineering construction, mechanical technology, agricultural technology and Chinese language, Ye said.

Thanks to the logistics enabled by the China-Europe Chang'an freight trains, some Central Asian young people have started businesses to engage in cross-border trade between Xi'an and their home countries, he said.

In November 2013, the first China-Europe Chang'an freight train departed from Xi'an to Almaty in Kazakhstan. Since then, the number of Chang'an train trips has steadily increased, reaching 4,639 last year.

Yu Jun, deputy director-general of the Foreign Ministry's Department of European-Central Asian Affairs, said the cooperation between Xi'an and Central Asian countries epitomizes the greater regional cooperation between China and Central Asia.

From left: The project of National Electric Networks Building in Uzbekistan. Balkhash Solar Power Plant in Kazakhstan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LONGi assists in the green energy transformation across Central Asia

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Central Asian countries not only have a superior geographical location, but they also have extremely rich solar resources and minerals. In order to better develop the local economy and the environment, Central Asian countries are accelerating the transformation to green energy. As one of the world's leading solar technology company, LONGi has achieved impressive results in countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

LONGi believes that solar power generation is one of the most effective solutions to solve power shortages and promote sustainable and green energy development. And the Balkhash Solar Power Plant Phase I capable of 50 megawatts is a successful example. The company provided around 91,000 Hi-MO 5 bifacial solar panels for this solar power plant. These solar panels have significant advantages operating in the local climate as they can capture sunlight reflected by snow and help reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The daily average temperature in Kazakhstan during the winter is — 20 C, which has a considerable impact on the performance of a solar stations. Due to the high conversion efficiency of the modules and constantly improving cell technology, LONGi's Hi-MO 5 modules have assured stable and efficient operation.

Along with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan is rising as a solar energy market. By participating in Uzbekistan's national strategy for energy transformation, the company has made efforts to immediately alleviate local power shortage problems.

Since its foray into the country in 2019, LONGi has supported the development of local energy-related companies and distributors. Up till now, the company carried out several government-led commercial and industrial projects in Uzbekistan and has provided multiple rooftop photovoltaic power generation systems. It has also helped the country in achieving its carbon neutrality goal.

In addition to assisting in the construction of solar power plants, LONGi takes a long-term perspective and helps develop local talents at different levels in the solar energy industry.

The company is cooperating with Uzbek universities in the field of green energy through a series of events such as the Green Uzbekistan Seminars and the PV general training courses. Through offline and online courses and cooperation with local training institutions, the company is introducing its technical talents into the market.

In March, LONGi organized the New Energy Innovation Competition for college students in Uzbekistan with the winners receiving scholarships.

LONGi has accumulated rich experience in overseas markets via long-term efforts, and has made practical contributions to the development of renewable energy in Central Asia. Since entering the market, LONGi has won broad recognition from customers with its reliable solar modules.

Founded in 2000, LONGi said it aspires to be a compelling solar technology company by leading the world's transition to green energy.

Being committed to the mission of making the best of solar energy to build a green world and the brand image of a trusted, reliable solar company that blazes the trail for green technology, LONGi focuses on technological innovation and endeavors to build its business in five sectors, covering mono silicon wafers, cells and modules, commercial and industrial distributed solar solutions, green energy solutions and hydrogen equipment.

It has grown into a green electricity plus green hydrogen product and solution provider that supports the global zero-carbon drive.

Its business has expanded to more than 150 countries and regions worldwide, with manufacturing bases in such countries as China, Vietnam, and Malaysia and branches in the United States, Japan, Germany, India, Australia and the United Arab Emirates.

As an advocate of the RE100, EP 100, and EV100 initiatives, LONGi sets its own Science-Based Targets initiative targets, or SBTi, to advance its green, sustainable development efforts and global energy reform, therefore contributing to a zero-carbon planet and a green Earth.

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Artists stage a traditional opera performance during the closing ceremony of the 9th China Qinqiang Opera Art Festival on June 24 in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. LIU XIAO / XINHUA

Qinqiang draws tourists to Xi'an

By CHEN NAN
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Qinqiang Opera, often referred to as China's "ancient rock music", is known for its dynamic rhythms and high-pitched singing style. As the most popular form of traditional opera in northwestern China, particularly in Shaanxi province, Qinqiang has its roots in the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) and was officially recognized as a form of national intangible cultural heritage in 2006.

Like many forms of traditional Chinese opera, Qinqiang incorporates singing, dancing, martial arts and acrobatics. Performed in the Shaanxi dialect, its repertoire primarily consists of old stories and folk tales.

In 1912, two scriptwriters from Shaanxi, Li Tongxuan (1860-1932) and Sun Renyu (1872-1934) created Yisushe, a troupe dedicated to the promotion and performance of the art.

They were inspired by the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, led by Sun Yat-sen, which sought to overthrow the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Unlike other troupes, most of which were founded by folk artists to entertain people and make a living, Yisushe was founded with the hope of making a difference during the war by educating those too poor to afford to go to school. The troupe also ran a school to train young performers of Qinqiang.

Today, Yisushe is one of the oldest art troupes in the country. It is based in Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi, and is still performing and exploring new ways of rejuvenating the traditional art form.

Originality and literary value are important facets of the troupe's productions. It preserves 880 original scripts in 1,000 volumes, which address social issues and embody values like honesty, bravery, loyalty and justice, according to Hui Minli, its president.

For example, one of the troupe's first productions was *Three Drops of Blood*, which premiered in 1919 and tells the story of a wrongful conviction. The original manuscript has been preserved and is now on display at the Museum of Yisushe in Xi'an.

In 2019, the troupe worked with the Shanghai Film Group to bring *Three Drops of Blood* to the silver screen by making the first 3D Qinqiang Opera movie, giving more people the opportunity to enjoy the ancient art form.

In 2016, it staged a contemporary production, titled *Yisushe*, to tell its history based on historic events. It was performed during the 11th China Art Festival, one of the country's largest national arts events.

Every year, Yisushe presents around 150 shows in cities and rural areas around northwestern China. About half the performances are held at universities and high schools to appeal to a younger audience.

In 2021, a street in the Gulou area of downtown Xi'an was turned into a cultural hub for Yisushe as a celebration of Qinqiang Opera, and was renamed the Yisu Theater Cultural District. Its theaters, restaurants and museums — among them, The Museum of Yisushe — are popular with both local people and tourists.

Visitors to Xi'an in search of Qinqiang Opera and other Shaanxi art forms also visit Tang Paradise, a popular theme park designed to resemble a royal garden from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) where regular shows are staged every day. They take place outdoors, providing visitors with an immersive experience.

In addition to Qinqiang Opera, shadow plays, another intangible cultural art form from Shaanxi, are also performed.

Combining leatherwork, shadow puppet performances and Qinqiang Opera songs, the art form originated during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). Huaxian county, in the northwest of the province, is particularly known for both performing and preserving the ancient art.

Signature dishes tantalize visitors

By LI YINGXUE
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A customer displays *roujiamo* she purchased from an eatery in Tongguan county, Shaanxi province, on Sept 28. TAO MING / XINHUA

Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, has secured a place among the most popular destinations during both the Spring Festival and Labor Day holidays, according to reports from online travel service company Trip.com.

The ancient capital has become an internet sensation for its enchanting appeal. While its historical and cultural landmarks awe visitors, it is the varied, mouthwatering selection of snacks that truly captivates their hearts.

As a result of its strategic location along the Silk Road, Xi'an is a melting pot of culinary influences from far and wide, and its history of growing wheat has led to the creation of an array of flour-based dishes, with noodles taking center stage.

From the iconic *biangbiang* noodles to the tantalizing oil-splashed noodles, Xi'an's noodle scene is a delightful journey through flavors and textures.

Biangbiang noodles are named for the "biang-ing" sound the noodles are said to make when they are beaten on the table as they are being formed. Quirkily, the Chinese character for *biang* is one of the most complex and intriguing in the language, as it is composed of 42 strokes.

While the appeal of *biangbiang* noodles is that they are wide and hand-pulled, their tantalizing toppings are also a highlight. They are typically garnished with a medley of savory ingredients, including spicy chili oil, aromatic garlic, fragrant vinegar and a variety of fresh vegetables. This combination of flavors and textures results in a harmonious symphony that aficionados say delights the senses.

The equally renowned oil-splashed noodle is not just a culinary delight, but also a visual and auditory feast to boot. The dish is finished by pouring a generous drizzle of scorching hot oil over a combination of chopped scallions, fragrant Sichuan peppercorns and a secret blend of spicy chili powder.

As the oil meets the ingredients, a magnificent spectacle unfolds, bubbling and sizzling energetically, and the bowl brims with a vibrant red hue.

Another iconic snack, *roujiamo*, is often referred to as the "Chinese hamburger". This sandwich-like delight has a lengthy history dating back approximately 2,400 years. *Yangrou paomo*, or flatbread soaked in lamb soup, is another signature Xi'an dish.

In recent years, hit TV dramas like *The Longest Day in Chang'an* and *Nothing Gold Can Stay* have also showcased the rich culinary heritage of Shaanxi.

Shaanxi *huamo* (or flower bread) is particularly popular in Xi'an and is listed as a national intangible cultural heritage. With its vibrant colors and variety of shapes, *huamo* captivates the eye with its dynamic and exaggerated forms. Depicting birds, animals, flowers, insects, historical figures and folk legends, each round of bread is an artistic masterpiece.

According to Bai Rong, an inheritor of Yanliang-style flower bread who comes from Xi'an's Yanliang district, *huamo* is an expression of ancestral worship, a way of sending blessings to elders and an embodiment of aspirations for a better life.

Bai said that in addition to flour, *huamo* is made using beans, dates, rice and pepper and not only tantalizes the taste buds, but also has remarkable visual appeal.

CHINA

Latest launch grows network for navigation

First Beidou satellite placed in orbit in 3 years to backup existing system

By ZHAO LEI in Xichang, Sichuan
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China launched a Long March 3B carrier rocket on Wednesday to transport a satellite into space for the country's Beidou Navigation Satellite System, marking the first deployment of a Beidou satellite in three years.

As the countdown ticked down to zero at 10:49 am at the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in the southwestern mountainous region of Sichuan province, eight engines on the Long March 3B's first stage and four boosters sprang to life and unleashed dazzling orange flame as they lifted the 20-story vehicle into clear skies.

Shortly after liftoff, the rocket successfully placed the satellite — 60th in the Beidou system and the first backup craft for the third-generation Beidou network — into a geostationary orbit, said Deng Hongqin, director of the Xichang center.

Designed and built by the China Academy of Space Technology in Beijing, the satellite has typical functions for a third-generation Beidou satellite — positioning, navigation and timing.

Compared with previous Beidou satellites, it has some upgraded hardware and features a stronger signal, faster transmission speed and higher operational stability, said Chen Zhonggui, chief designer of Beidou's third-generation satellites.

Despite being called a backup, the satellite is designed to start working as soon as it enters orbit. Its primary tasks are to expand the service areas of Beidou's short-messaging function, enhance Beidou's positioning accuracy as well as improve the network's operational continuity and reliability, he noted.

"The new satellite will help to increase the Beidou network's short-messaging service capacity for nations and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative. Its operation will also enable Beidou users to access rapid, high-precision positioning service," said Wang Dong, deputy project manager of the third-generation Beidou network.

"Before the end of this year, another two backup Beidou satellites are scheduled to be launched to further strengthen the reliability of the network," he noted.

Beidou is currently China's largest civilian satellite system and one of four global navigation networks, along with the United States' GPS, Russia's GLONASS and the European Union's Galileo.

Since 2000, a total of 60 Beidou satellites, including the first four experimental ones, have been lifted on 45 Long March 3 series rockets from Xichang.

In June 2020, the final satellite to complete Beidou's third-generation network was lifted by a Long March 3B rocket at the Xichang center. The following month, President Xi Jinping announced that the system had been completed and had begun providing full-scale global services.

Currently, there are 46 satellites in active service, including the latest one.

According to the most recent statistics from the Global Navigation Satellite System and Location-Based Services Association of China, by the end of 2021, the overall value of satellite-enabled navigation and positioning services in China stood at 469 billion yuan ($67 billion), a 16.3 percent increase year-on-year.

China plans to establish the next generation of the Beidou system by 2035. The new version will be "omnipresent, smarter and more integrated" and upon its completion, there will be Beidou service not only on land and sea, but also in the sky, outer space and deep within the oceans, according to the China Satellite Navigation Office.

Quality yields

Villagers harvest silkworm cocoons at a farm in Dongxing district of Neijiang, Sichuan province, on Wednesday. Tests show that the quality and per-unit yields of silkworms have both increased, with the village's first batch of silkworms cultivated this spring producing some 147 metric tons of cocoons. HUANG ZHENGHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Bali deaths of Chinese pair result of 'internal conflict', police say

By CUI JIA
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Police in Bali, Indonesia, said on Wednesday that the two Chinese citizens who were found dead at a hotel on May 1 had not been killed by others, and that their deaths had been caused by an internal conflict between the two, local media reported.

Police said at a news conference that according to their investigations, the man had strangled the woman with the belt from a dressing gown and then took his own life by stabbing his neck and other parts of his body with a broken beer bottle at an InterContinental hotel in Bali, Bali Post reported.

Police said their deaths had been caused as a result of "internal problems between them". While previously staying at another hotel in the Sanur area of Bali, the pair had been seen arguing and the man's left hand appeared to be injured, said Police Commissioner Bambang Yugo Pamungkas in Denpasar, capital of Bali province.

The man was found dead in the hotel hallway and the woman was found dead in the bathtub in the room that they had stayed in. Both were naked, local police added.

Local media previously reported that the room had been booked by the woman, who checked in alone on April 30. The man is said to have arrived at 12:17 am on May 1. The two later ordered food, which was delivered to the room at around 1:20 am.

At 6:34 am on May 1, a hotel staff member received a call from a guest who said they heard calls for help from the hallway. Staff then discovered the bodies, according to local media reports.

Firm that hosted reckless comic fined

By CUI JIA
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The organizer of a talk show during which a comedian made a joke that angered the People's Liberation Army and had an adverse impact on society, has been fined and all of its shows in Beijing have been suspended indefinitely, the Beijing Culture and Tourism Bureau said in a statement on Wednesday.

On Saturday, the Beijing Cultural Market Comprehensive Law Enforcement Team received a complaint that Li Haoshi, a comedian whose stage name is House, made an inappropriate joke about the PLA's motto during a talk show held in Beijing by the Shanghai Xiaosheng Culture Media Company.

During his standup performance on Saturday, Li said that he had adopted two stray dogs that like to run wild and chase squirrels. He said his pets' behavior made him think of "maintain excellent conduct, can fight and win", words that are part of the PLA's motto.

The joke, which Li told during two shows on Saturday, severely insulted the PLA and had a strong negative impact on society, according to the statement. Furthermore, the joke wasn't part of the script used for his performance, and it was something he deliberately added in, it said.

The company has violated the Regulation on the Administration of Commercial Performances, which states that the content of commercial performances shouldn't harm social values, it added.

After investigating, the law enforcement team decided to impose administrative penalties on the company, including confiscating 1.33 million yuan ($190,000) made from the shows and issuing a fine of 13.35 million yuan.

Further legal action is also expected to be taken against parties involved in the case, including Li and the venue operator.

Meanwhile, the Beijing Bureau of Culture and Tourism has decided to indefinitely suspend all of the company's performances in the capital, the statement said.

It said that no one is permitted to deliberately insult PLA forces and deeply hurt the feelings that Chinese people have for soldiers during any performance in Beijing. It also said that any act such as Li's that makes light of serious matters for entertainment purposes should also be prohibited.

The law enforcement team will adhere to strict supervision and law enforcement, and resolutely target behavior that focuses on financial gain without social responsibility.

Beijing police said in a statement on Wednesday night that they have filed a case on the incident and begun investigating. No more information, including what violations or crimes Li or the company have been suspected of, has been disclosed.

Netizens and the PLA have responded strongly to Li's joke on Chinese social media, deeming it inappropriate, provocative and insulting.

In response, Shanghai Xiaoguo Culture Media Company, the parent company of Xiaosheng, said in a statement on Wednesday that the incident had exposed major loopholes in show management.

The company has terminated its contract with Li and has taken disciplinary action against its senior management team. It will suspend all shows in China for review, the company's statement said.

Science on show

Visitors tour the science research vessel *Tansuo 2* in Fuzhou, Fujian province, on Wednesday. During an event organized with the maritime-themed Museum of Foochow Arsenal 1866, the ship, which can support deep-ocean missions and deep-sea submersibles, lowered its gangplank for science lovers.
ZHANG BIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Authorities to address unemployed young people

By CHENG SI
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Chinese authorities are working on solutions to improve the employment situation for young people, who have faced increasing unemployment in the past few months due to structural imbalances in the job market.

The National Bureau of Statistics released its latest figures on Tuesday, showing that the unemployment rate for young people aged 16 to 24 years old climbed to 20.4 percent in April, up 0.8 of a percentage point from the previous month, while the general surveyed unemployment rate has fallen in the past two months and stabilized at 5.2 percent in April.

NBS spokesman Fu Linghui said that the nation's job market will remain stable as the economy recovers from the impact of the pandemic, and supportive employment policies take effect.

But the nation still faces heavy employment pressure and a greater structural imbalance of the job market because of the growing number of college graduates and the high unemployment rate among young people, he said.

He said that central departments are figuring out solutions to help improve the situation and will offer tailored services and guidance to young job seekers.

Li Qiang, vice-president of recruitment portal Zhaopin, said that the young generation's increasing desire for stable jobs in government bodies or large companies, and plans of continuing education, may also be causes of their "delayed employment".

"Some graduates have postponed their employment because they are preparing for civil servant or postgraduate entrance examinations (which are usually held in the third or fourth quarter of the year), and others are yet to land jobs because they haven't found satisfactory offers or are unwilling to lower their expectations," he said.

He added that the structural imbalance of the job market may also be a reason for the high unemployment rate among young people. "Many industries and private companies including those in education, the internet, information technology and real estate — which used to be the main employers of college graduates — are adjusting their recruitment plans due to industrial restructuring.

"Overall, we can see the job market is in recovery because of the reviving economy in the post-epidemic era, but the structural imbalance remains a problem, so it's necessary for young job seekers to be well-prepared and to view their future career rationally," he said.

A key group among the young workforce, college graduates — whose number is expected to grow to 11.58 million this year — have attracted much attention and assistance from government and society.

The Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China launched an employment promotion campaign in the northeastern province of Jilin on Saturday, aimed at helping college students, fresh college graduates and those who graduated last year find job opportunities.

Over 60,000 vacancies and 2,000 internships from 1,100-plus employers will be available until the end of the month.

Meng Wei, spokeswoman for the National Development and Reform Commission, said at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday that developing the economy is fundamental in relieving employment problems, and it's necessary to support companies, which are major employers, by optimizing tax policies and services.

She said that developing the manufacturing industry and incubating new industries will help create more job opportunities, and it's important to improve the financial, industrial and entrepreneurship environment in counties and the countryside to make these areas more attractive to job seekers.

HK teachers visit Beijing to strengthen cooperation in education

By ZOU SHUO
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The Chinese mainland and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region should strengthen cooperation in education and carry out more exchanges among teachers and students to promote mutual learning, officials and teachers said on Tuesday.

Some 200 primary and secondary school principals and teachers from Hong Kong are currently on an exchange tour to Beijing. It is the largest teacher group the city has sent to the mainland since two-way travel fully resumed.

The trip, from Monday to Thursday, will take the teachers to Beijing primary and secondary schools, enterprises and cultural events, so they can gain a better understanding of the mainland's socioeconomic development and achievements in basic education.

The opening ceremony of the tour was held at Beijing Normal University on Tuesday.

Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, greeted the teachers from Hong Kong and spoke highly of the significance of the group's visit.

He hoped that principals and teachers in Hong Kong can work hard to become good principals and teachers, nurture more exceptional talent and promote educational development in the city.

Christine Choi Yuk-lin, Secretary for Education of the Hong Kong SAR government, said it is the responsibility and mission for educators to cultivate talent.

As Hong Kong embarks on a new journey of transformation from stability to prosperity, the educators of the city need to guide students to gain a better understanding of the country, and give full play to Hong Kong's unique advantages to contribute to national development goals, she said.

"We need to cultivate our students to become responsible and visionary people with a love of the country and motherland, and with good morality and talent," she said.

The city will promote experience sharing and make good use of the teacher training platforms of mainland universities to promote high-quality education through the mutual learning of principals and teachers, she added.

Yu Bin, an official with the Ministry of Education's Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan affairs office, said the event aims to help principals and teachers from Hong Kong gain a better understanding of the mainland's education policy and strengthen exchanges and cooperation between Hong Kong and Beijing in basic education.

"We need to keep up with the times and gain an accurate understanding of the new directions of national education reform," she said.

The ministry will fully support education cooperation between the mainland and Hong Kong and provide more opportunities and platforms for mutual learning, she added.

Peng Yan-shan, a new teacher from Hong Kong's SKH St. John's Primary School, said the trip offers a valuable opportunity for the teachers to experience cultural development, improve their understanding of the country and their professional ability, and help their students to cultivate national identity.

"As new teachers, we are deeply aware of our responsibility and mission of not only teaching knowledge, but also guiding and inspiring students," she said. "We must stay humble and constantly improve our teaching ability and improve our knowledge and horizons."

COMMENT

Editorials

In trying to grab Beijing by throat, Washington should exercise reason

The hearing the US Senate Appropriations Committee held on Tuesday, in which it discussed the White House 2024 federal budget in terms of international trade and security goals, exposes how much China weighs in the calculations of Washington. And the extent to which those calculations risk precipitating a misstep of potentially epic proportions.

The testimonies of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo indicate that the majority of the Joe Biden administration's budget requests for the next fiscal year have been formulated with a zero-sum mindset.

The budget shows that China is in the crosshairs of the US' overall military buildup in the West Pacific, with the island of Taiwan as the focal point. It also indicates that the Biden administration will further intensify its "competition" with China. Competition has become a euphemism for the coercive diplomacy it has customized for China. It will also evidently continue to press ahead with its trade bullying of China and its attempts to decouple with China in the technology and finance fields.

Although Blinken once again claimed that the US does not seek conflict with China or to wage a Cold War against it, the wide spectrum of the topics the hearing has touched upon, ranging from the so-called China's threat in space to that in baby formula, highlights the Biden administration is portraying China with a Cold War brush.

But the problem for the Biden administration is whether doing so can demonstrably help strengthen the US' competitiveness vis-a-vis China.

Or to put it bluntly, whether China will accept the "rules" the US is trying to enforce on it.

These "rules", as the hearing made it clear, include China allowing the US to support the "independence" of Taiwan and to dismember its sovereignty and territorial integrity in East China Sea and South China Sea, as well as accepting the sanctioning of any Chinese entities that Washington chooses, and to baselessly smear China around the world.

If that is what Blinken referred to in the hearing as putting the US "in a position of strength to compete intensely to shape the broader strategic environment around China", what the Biden administration is seeking is to force China to "change its trajectory", something Blinken claims the administration has no intention of doing. What the hearing highlighted was the "broader strategic environment" the Biden administration is trying to shape around China is one that encircles, contains and isolates.

The US calls for China to unconditionally accept its "rules", as if it is doing China a favor by ushering the country into the civilized world. It is hubristic of the US politicians in the hearing to attribute China's development achievements to it taking advantage of the US, as if all US investors and companies are doing charity work engaging with China. And it is discreditous for it to portray the restrained countermeasures Beijing has taken to prevent the US from taking the country by the throat as evidence of China breaking the "rules-based" order of the world.

Being well aware of Washington's propensity to propel national progress by fabricating foreign enemies, China has been exercising strategic restraint and composure in the face of Washington's coercive and aggressive behaviors, always bearing in mind the bigger picture of not only Sino-US relations but also the common good of the world.

That's why it has restrained itself from dishing out what the US orders. But the question is for how long that forbearance can be sustained if the US misinterprets China's self-restraint for weakness and reaches out for a yard after taking an inch.

Western double standards a source of troubles

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz hit the bull's eye when he offered a reality check on the West's double standards in a speech in Berlin on Monday, attributing the reluctance of some influential countries such as India, Vietnam and South Africa to criticize Moscow for the Russia-Ukraine conflict, to the fact that they believe international principles are not applied equally.

"When I talk to leaders from those countries, many assure me that they are not questioning the underlying principles of our international order. What they are struggling with is the unequal application of those principles," he said. "What they expect is representation on equal terms, and an end to Western double standards."

His remarks are revealing, given that examples of Western countries resorting to double standards on such issues as free trade, human rights and democracy to advance their own agendas abound. The practice has become a major source of global instability and frictions on economic and geopolitical fronts.

Take the United States for instance. While it constantly criticizes China for challenging the rules-based international order, the country itself has grossly violated the World Trade Organization rules governing the multilateral trade system by unilaterally imposing tariffs and sanctions on other countries.

And comparing the way Europe has dealt with Ukrainian refugees over those fleeing from conflicts in the Global South, CNN's correspondent Arwa Damon observed that, "We are painfully seeing that refugees are selectively welcomed, and war criminals are selectively punished. It's not just the Western media that is biased; it's the Western world."

Such bias, often born out of Western arrogance and hypocrisy, has also eroded the trust that exists among nations to enable them to work together to deal with the real challenges that confront humanity, such as climate change.

Even though many European countries are seeking to revive coal projects to prioritize energy security, they have pointed an accusing finger at African countries, the least responsible for global warming, for not doing enough to meet their climate obligations. That's despite the fact that the continent has not received the full amount of promised funding and technologies from the developed world to switch from fossil fuels to clean energy.

The time has gone when the West could claim the high moral ground and dictate to the rest of the world what they should do based on the Western standards. It would be a boon for the world if the Western countries took a look in the mirror before passing judgment on others.

Disgraced Truss' Taiwan trip takes the biscuit

If the 10 days when her government's business was suspended during the period of national mourning for the passing of Queen Elizabeth II was deducted, Liz Truss actually served as the United Kingdom's head of government for only 39 days, rather than 49 days. That makes her the shortest-serving prime minister in the UK's history. It is a record that will be hard to beat.

Despite her short tenure, she managed to inflict her own damage on the country. To tackle inflation and energy shortage, her government introduced an energy price guarantee policy to cap energy prices, and a mini-budget program of large-scale borrowing and tax cuts. These caused financial instability, and all of them were criticized and quickly reversed. What advice then could Truss, who famously lost out in comparison to a lettuce, offer to the authorities on the island of Taiwan except how to cause chaos.

What the Taiwan authorities hope to gain from Truss' five-day visit starting from Tuesday is anybody's guess. Allowing the island to become a catwalk for disgraced Western politicians desperate for the public eye only serves to expose the nature of these visits as marriages of convenience.

Such collusion is nothing but a "dangerous political show", as China's embassy in the UK said.

The speech Truss gave on Wednesday proved the point, as it showed that the former UK leader, who proved unfit for office, intends to take advantage of the visit to do nothing but parrot Washington's words to pour oil on fire over the Taiwan question.

To give Truss her due, she has been consistent in acting as a mouthpiece of Washington. In a speech titled "The Return of Geopolitics" in April 2022, Truss, then the UK's foreign secretary, called on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to be ready to tackle global threats by working with Japan and Australia to ensure order in the Pacific, saying: "We must ensure that democracies like Taiwan are able to defend themselves".

It is clear that Truss has nothing of any value to offer for the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question. Her trip is motivated by her desire to earn some personal political capital from it. But in doing so, she is playing an ugly role inciting the Taiwan secessionists to further their collusion with external forces to turn the island into a geopolitical tool for them.

The number of visits some "distinguished guests" from the West have made to the island lately has laid bare the fact that it is these Western politicians playing the "Taiwan card" for their own narrow ends that threaten the peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and that are taking the initiative to try and change the status quo of the Strait via brinkmanship.

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Zheng Huawei

Opinion Line

Whiff of anti-China sentiment in patent case against drone firm

A federal jury in Waco, Texas, ruled last month that DJI, a Chinese drone manufacturer, should compensate Textron $279 million for violating two patents of the US-based company.

The two patents include the "remote tracking control technology" filed by Textron in 2004 and granted in 2011, and the "automatic aircraft hover control technology" it applied for in 2011 and got approval for in 2015.

Reportedly, Textron contacted DJI in 2019 intending to sell its relevant patents, but DJI believed that it had long conducted its own research and development in these technologies. In 2021, Textron sued DJI in the United States, seeking $367 million in damages.

Following the verdict, DJI issued a statement saying that its products do not use Textron's technology, also pointing out that Textron manufactures military helicopters while it manufactures civilian drones.

The technologies the two companies employ are fundamentally different. Take hover technology as an example. According to experts, Textron's hover technology requires the pilot's involvement in order to control the aircraft through mechanical and hydraulic systems, while the automatic hover function of the DJI drone operates through remote control in someone's hand. As the global leader in civilian drones, DJI holds more than 8,000 patents worldwide. Insiders say, just because there is no company in the US that can sue DJI for civilian drones, the US has had to turn to a military aircraft technology company like Textron.

From the perspective of timing, Textron's patent claim doesn't hold water. Textron applied for the "automatic hover control" patent on July 14, 2011, and it was approved on October 19, 2011, but DJI publicly used such hover control technology in its XP3.1 fly-control system in 2009, two years before Textron filed its patent application. It is unreasonable for a later patent applicant to seek compensation from a company that had used the technology earlier.

The underlying reasons why Textron sued DJI remain unclear, but Western countries always like to set a "patent trap" for emerging economies in a bid to obstruct and exclude competitors and obtain improper economic benefits. At the same time, Textron has taken advantage of the current anti-China sentiment in the US to cast dirty water on DJI and influence the jury's ruling in its favor.

— NIUTANQIN

Truth must prevail even in virtual world

The Ministry of Public Security's 100-day crackdown against online rumormongers is bearing fruit. Until Tuesday, the ministry had cracked 300 cases and suspended more than 2,000 accounts that were spreading rumors.

Ten of the 300 cases were cited as examples, including those that were spreading rumors about Hu Xinyu, a 15-year-old high school student who went missing in October 2022 before his body was found in January. While he had committed suicide, the rumormongers were saying he had been murdered and his organs sold. There were others who were fabricating lies about Yunnan villagers going to work in northern Myanmar and having their kidneys removed and sold in the black market.

These account holders are skilled in spreading rumors, as they know what kind of news will find takers, such as kidneys being removed or students going missing. However, they are misusing their skills to commit illegal activities that are detrimental to social order just to gain more followers and become popular by feeding those who love conspiracy theories.

While the rumormongers gained desired public attention, society paid a huge price. The ministry has done a good job by blocking these accounts that spread rumors.

More can be done to prevent similar things from happening in the future. The fact that rumors spread so effectively – as explained by the analogy of a lie traveling around the globe while the truth is still putting on its shoes – is a major problem. It was thus very important to block the accounts that are spreading rumors. For truth to prevail, it is important to ensure that people receive information that is authentic and not false rumors.

It is said in economics that bad money drives out good. The same applies to social networking sites and more needs to be done to ensure that, in the end, truth prevails.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Washington shows it's the rule-breaking aggressor

By sending around 200 troops to Taiwan to provide military training, Washington has gone even farther in walking back on the promises it has made on the question of Taiwan.

Abiding by the one-China principle is the foundation of bilateral relations between China and the United States, and was also the promise the US government made when the two countries established diplomatic relations.

It was made clear in the three joint communiques that the People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate government of China and the US acknowledged the PRC's position that Taiwan is part of China. Even today, Washington still declares that it acknowledges that there is only one China, and Taiwan is part of China, and it never supports "Taiwan independence".

However, what it is saying is one thing, and what it has been doing is another thing. Washington has increased the frequency and scale of arms sales to Taiwan in recent years, which is obviously an act of backpedaling on what it has promised in the three joint communiques.

What is worth noting is the fact that secessionists in Taiwan are doing whatever they can to make it a fait accompli that the island is an "independent country".

The Chinese mainland has been trying to realize a peaceful reunification with the island, but it will take back the island through the use of military force if necessary.

The frequent sale of arms, the visits by US politicians, including those in government positions, and even one by the speaker of the House of Representatives last year, as well as the latest move of sending troops to provide military training, all send the wrong message to secessionists on the island. Which are making relations across the Taiwan Strait even more complicated and escalating tensions.

Should these Taiwan secessionists make a miscalculation by taking it for granted that they have the support of the US for their maneuvers for "Taiwan Independence", Washington will certainly be to blame for precipitating the worst-case scenario.

What the US has been doing with regard to Taiwan has been steadily eroding the foundation for bilateral relations between the two countries.

Taiwan is a core interest of China. Washington is infringing upon the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China by sending troops to the island, and the consequences would be disastrous as far as the bilateral relations as well as the regional situation are concerned.

Washington should never underestimate the resolve of the Chinese mainland and the capability of its People's Liberation of Army to defend the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Washington should be mindful of bilateral ties being damaged beyond repair. That will be disastrous not only to regional security but also to that of the world.

— ZHU YUAN, CHINA DAILY

VIEWS

China and the World Roundtable | China-Central Asia Cooperation

Editor's note: *The China-Central Asia Summit, to be held on Thursday and Friday, is expected to not only strengthen relations but also boost cooperation and trade between China and the Central Asian states. Six commentators share their views with China Daily on China-Central Asia cooperation.*

China-Central Asia partnership to bear more fruits

SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Cooperation important part of neighborhood diplomacy

Lu Shanbing, dean of the Central Asia Institute of Northwestern University, Xi'an, Shaanxi province

In the 31 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) China has adhered to the basic diplomatic principle of good neighborliness and partnership, and considered Central Asia an important part of its neighborhood diplomacy.

These principles have helped strengthen bilateral relations between China and the five Central Asian countries. The relationships have also been strengthened because China and Central Asian countries support each other, and respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and choice of development path.

"Peace, harmony, cooperation, non-confrontation, and not seeking to establish a sphere of influence" are the basic characteristics of China's diplomacy with Central Asian countries. China and the five Central Asian countries have elevated their relationships from good-neighborly friendship to strategic partnerships, and have become veritable good neighbors, good friends, good partners, and a model for building a new type of international relations in the new era.

In fact, Central Asia became "the first strategic partner cluster around China", making remarkable achievements in various fields. And economic cooperation between China and the five Central Asian countries has become the ballast strengthening bilateral relations. The two sides have also elevated their economic cooperation from mainly bilateral to a combination of bilateral and multilateral relations, with trade in goods and services becoming increasingly diversified, and the cooperation model changing from functional cooperation to institutionalized cooperation. The result is the establishment of a mutually beneficial economic relationship based on mutual respect, mutual benefit and good neighborliness.

We firmly believe the China-Central Asia Summit, to be held on Thursday and Friday, will usher in another golden period for China and Central Asia in the next three decades.

Kazakhstan welcomes new format of cooperation

Ruslan Izimov, a researcher of the Center for the Study of Central Asia and China, Kazakhstan

Relations between the five Central Asian states and China have reached an important milestone. Just over 30 years ago, the Central Asian countries gained independence and began building a new type of cooperation with their eastern neighbor. Relations between the five Central Asian states and China have reached an important milestone. Just over 30 years ago, the Central Asian countries gained independence and began building a new type of cooperation with their eastern neighbor. In this relatively short period of time, Kazakhstan's relationship with China has reached the high level of permanent comprehensive strategic partnership, characterized by multidimensional interaction in all spheres of activity.

At the turn of the millennium, we began interacting in a multilateral format under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was formed following the resolution of all border issues among the six countries and the establishment of an atmosphere of trust and good neighborliness.

Exactly 10 years ago, China proposed jointly developing an economic belt along the Silk Road, thereby revitalizing the ancient artery that for centuries had facilitated exchanges between the peoples and civilizations along the route. The Silk Road Economic Belt, which President Xi Jinping proposed in a speech at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan, has evolved into the grandiose Belt and Road Initiative, which today involves more than 150 countries.

The past decade has seen Central Asian countries playing a key role in the development of the initiative. No wonder some of the largest Belt and Road projects have been implemented in Central Asia. New plants, factories, infrastructure facilities and new railway lines have been opened up, and plants generating clean energy have become operational.

Thanks to the joint efforts of all sides, we have managed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, as proved by lifting of the last quarantine and other restrictions this year. This year has also seen China announcing that it would vigorously promote the Belt and Road Initiative, promote multilateral cooperation, and help strengthen economic globalization. This year will also see China hosting the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, where Beijing is likely to announce new plans for advancing the initiative.

There is no doubt that in the next 10 years, the Belt and Road Initiative will reach new heights of development, with Central Asia continuing to play a key role in it. Scientific progress and advanced technologies have helped China and other countries to build the grand Western Europe-Western China Highway and open cross-border railway routes between China and Central Asia countries, which have made transportation more convenient. This in turn has allowed Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries to once again act as a multifunctional bridge between Europe and Asia.

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are connected with China through a single gas artery, and a new pipeline being built will connect Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with China. Additionally, the promising China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project is entering a critical stage. This means all the five Central Asian countries have a solid foundation for strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation with China.

In this regard, we have high expectations from the Central Asia-China Summit, which will be held on Thursday and Friday. And there is every reason to believe the summit will open a new page in China-Central Asia relations based on pragmatic economic interests, and mutual understanding and trust. This is important because Central Asia-China cooperation could become a model of mutually beneficial relations amid rising xenophobia, trade protectionism and regional conflicts.

Kyrgyzstan active participant in BRI

Igor Shestakov, a political scientist at Ordo Center, Kyrgyzstan

China has become one of the main trade and economic partners of Central Asian countries over the past three decades, especially due to the integration of Silk Road Economic Belt projects with the development programs of the five countries in the region in the past decade.

An important reason for this is the Chinese leadership's commitment to deliver on its promises in order to promote the country's peaceful development, which has had a significant impact on building good neighborly relations with Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries. It has also had a positive impact on the conceptual approach to the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, because jointly promoting peace is an important component of the comprehensive partnership under the SCO framework.

In 2022, marking the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the five Central Asian countries, President Xi Jinping emphasized that the key to successful cooperation between China and the five states lies in mutual respect, good-neighborliness, solidarity in trying times and mutual benefit.

In particular, China's experience of containing COVID-19 and providing medical assistance to the Central Asian countries helped the latter to implement better prevention and control measures. As for Kyrgyzstan, it received the first batch of testing kits and face masks in March 2020 at a time when they were in short supply throughout the world. After that, China dispatched doctors and other medical workers to Kyrgyzstan who shared their experience with Kyrgyz doctors, helping them to better combat the disease.

China has provided Kyrgyzstan with substantial support over the years for the implementation of major infrastructure projects in the fields of roads, water supply facilities, and housing for public sector workers.

One of the important areas of regional cooperation is the Silk Road Economic Belt, which, in the current global economic situation, can help stabilize the world economy and enhance the investment potential of Central Asia. As one of the most strategic projects of the Silk Road Economic Belt, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, when completed, will improve transportation and boost logistics cooperation among the countries. According to experts, the direct benefits from the railway include improved access to global markets for the Central Asian countries, better trade and economic infrastructure, and increased urbanization.

The railway project includes building bridges, tunnels, stations and logistics centers. Constructing housing, roads, warehouses and gas stations is also part of Belt and Road projects, which will improve urban agglomeration, create clusters of processing enterprises, and increase economic diversification. This in turn will lead to the emergence of hundreds and thousands of trade and service enterprises, creating new jobs and reducing the migration of workers. All this, according to some economists, will lead to an increase in Kyrgyz people's real incomes.

Yet to truly strengthen their economic cooperation, China and the Central Asian countries need to increase investment, and invite experts, the media and the public to objectively assess the results and prospects of interstate cooperation, so as to promote dialogue among the people and experts from all the countries.

Belt and Road projects benefit Tajikistan

Karieva Farangis Abdurahimovna, a researcher at the National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan

Chinese President Xi Jinping's proposal of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in 2013 subsequently resulted in a common development policy called the Belt and Road Initiative, which is aimed at improving existing and creating new trade routes, and transport and economic corridors connecting more than 60 countries of Asia, Europe and Africa.

Tajikistan supports the Belt and Road Initiative because, among other things, it will also strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation with China in the fields of trade, investment, transport and communication, and help establish a new, efficient and economically viable interregional transportation system.

The Belt and Road Initiative is a mega project of great historical significance in terms of its prospects for trade and economic cooperation for the benefit of all participating countries and helping improve the well-being of the people.

For Central Asian countries, the implementation of Belt and Road projects will create a good opportunity to deepen regional cooperation, expand the scale of transportation and communication corridors, and promote cultural exchanges. China may have proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, but all the countries involved will benefit from the Belt and Road projects.

The prospects of the revival of the ancient Silk Road were being discussed in the media for a long time, but after Beijing hosted the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017 and in 2019, the whole world turned its eyes to China.

And as expected, the ancient Silk Road has been revived with renewed vigor in the 21st century.

Uzbekistan's cooperation prospects in BRI are high

Shukhrat Isakulov, an advisor to the BRI Center in the Uzbek Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Uzbekistan is an active participant in numerous projects under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, which helps improve infrastructure connectivity and create economic corridors connecting more countries in Asia, Europe and Africa. The projects will also contribute to the development of Uzbekistan's trade relations with other countries, especially China, which is a major trading partner of more than 140 countries.

The new model of cooperation envisages measures such as political coordination, infrastructure connectivity, trade liberalization, free movement of capital, and strengthening mutual understanding among peoples on the basis of mutual benefit and taking into account the interests of every country.

The unique nature of the Belt and Road Initiative lies in the fact that its projects are open to all countries, and regional and global organizations. It is also the foundation of economic cooperation and the reason for China's leading position in the projects.

Of particular interest to Uzbekistan is the Silk Road Economic Belt, which along with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road makes up the Belt and Road Initiative, and starting from China, passes through Central Asia and West Asia to Europe (the Baltic Sea) and the Mediterranean.

As for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, it starts from China and passes through Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean to the Pacific on the one hand and the Persian Gulf and Africa on the other. Given its expanding range and geography, and since it facilitates the exports of goods, Uzbekistan also has great interest in the 21st Maritime Silk Road.

In the short term, Uzbekistan is interested in accelerating the implementation of the China-Central Asia-West Asia corridor. Belt and Road agreements outline projects in the fields of infrastructure construction, investment in industrial facilities, development of natural resources, trade, financial cooperation, people-to-people exchanges, environmental protection, and maritime cooperation. All of this will attract billions of dollars in investment, help create modern infrastructure, stimulate the training of personnel, and create new jobs, which will serve the interests of Uzbekistan.

As an important factor in expanding cooperation in the region under the Belt and Road framework, Uzbekistan's interactions with other economies on multilateral cooperation mechanisms through the SCO, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation Program and other similar organizations are crucial.

To finance projects, two new financial institutions were established at the initiative of China: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund, which have provided loans for many countries and therefore helped them boost their economic development. For example, Uzbekistan has signed an agreement with the Silk Road Fund to get a loan of $585 million to invest in and develop its oil and gas sector.

The portfolio of the AIIB in Uzbekistan consists of investment projects in the fields of rural infrastructure development, water supply and sanitation, healthcare, road building and reconstruction, and energy development.

We are confident about the successful implementation of all Belt and Road projects, as they are based on equality, and mutual respect and trust.

There is a need to boost Sino-Turkmen friendship

Muhammedova Ogulbagt, a student at Northwest University, Xi'an, Shaanxi province

China's unique tradition and its socioeconomic development over the past four decades are nothing less than remarkable. I've wanted to study in China since I learned in high school that China was the historical starting point of the ancient Silk Road in the East.

Turkmen President Serdar Berdymukhamedov has created an opportunity for us to know more about China by introducing Chinese language courses in Turkmenistan's universities. In addition, a lot of young people from our country are pursuing higher studies in China.

Having been studying in China since 2018, I find the Chinese people very kind and helpful. And I will try to introduce new elements of China's history, culture, tradition and governance system to the Chinese courses in Turkmenistan when I return home. That would be my contribution to the strengthening of China-Turkmenistan friendship and the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

WORLD

Chinese bag 17 awards at London photo show

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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Photographers from China were once again among the big winners as the results of the Pink Lady Food Photographer of the Year awards for 2023 were announced in London on Tuesday night.

The competition, which has been running for 12 years and drew thousands of entries from more than 65 countries this year, is the world's leading celebration of the art of food photography and film.

All photos are judged anonymously, so decisions are made entirely on merit. This year's overall top prize went to British photographer Jon Enoch for his image *The Candy Man*, taken in India. Entrants from China took away 17 other awards.

One photographer alone, Yang Zhonghua, won three categories. The image *Anchang Sugar Dance Artist*, showing a man in Zhejiang province working skillfully with sugar, won both the Philip Harben Award for Food in Action and the competition's specific China category.

Yang also won the Moments of Joy category for the picture *Hanging Up Persimmons*.

Another person who enjoyed a successful night was Liang Haikun, whose image *Ancient Wine Making*, showing traditional baijiu brewing techniques, came second in the China-specific class, where he also picked up two other highly commended honors, and also came third in the Food in Action category.

The same photographer took third place in the Champagne Taittinger Food for Celebration category for another image.

Other Chinese photographers among the winners included Liu Min, Yu Chunshui, Li Jianping, Cui Boqian, Zhao Xinhua and Yang Yongsheng.

Among the judges at this year's competition were Na Risong, art director of Inter Art Center & Gallery in Beijing; Ella Ravilious, curator of Victoria and Albert Museum in London; and chef Louie Ye, known as the Godfather of Chinese pastry.

Event founder Caroline Kenyon said the latest success showed the diligence and creativity of photographers in China, and the cultural importance of food in Chinese identity.

"Food is so culturally important still in China, maybe unlike some other countries where there's a bit of a loss of connection between people and what they consume," she said.

"It's a strong home food culture, and being such a vast country it's a rich and fertile place for a photographer to point their lens."

Anchang Sugar Dance Artist, taken by photographer Yang Zhonghua.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Hanging Up Persimmons, clicked by Yang Zhonghua.

Asia-Pacific can set pace on climate: UN

Regional cooperation key to achieving sustainable development, meeting told

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
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Urgent action is needed to combat climate change and prevent 7.5 million people from falling into poverty by 2030, according to the 79th session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, or ESCAP.

The potential environmental impacts in Asia-Pacific are alarming, but most countries are ill-prepared for multiple overlapping crises, ESCAP warned in a report.

Global warming poses major challenges to all strands of sustainable development in Asia-Pacific, a region with 13 of the 30 countries most vulnerable to climate change, it said.

"Asia and the Pacific can set the pace of climate action in the decades to come," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at the session held in Bangkok, Thailand, on Monday. "Most countries in the region have already pledged carbon neutrality goals toward midcentury. But we need to accelerate action, with steep reductions in emissions within the next few years."

The costs of climate change are high. ESCAP estimates that annual average losses resulting from natural and biological hazards in Asia and the Pacific are around $780 billion.

As Asia-Pacific countries rebuild after the pandemic, subregions are facing extreme weather events that threaten resilient and sustainable development, it said.

For the Pacific, home to many small island developing states, climate change remains the single greatest threat to livelihoods, sovereignty and existence, the report said.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN under-secretary-general and executive secretary of ESCAP, said the integrated nature of climate change calls for holistic, multisectoral solutions and targeted support.

"Each one of us and every aspect of our world is being affected," she said. "Those who are most exposed and have the fewest resources to respond to climate change, however, are the most vulnerable."

China, Japan, Russia and South Korea have set national goals to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 or 2060 and have been developing specific policies and road maps.

"Considering the various situation of the nations, although we share some issues in common, we have different responsibilities for the implementation of the Paris Treaty and achieving net-zero," Zhang Ming, secretary-general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, said in his keynote address on Tuesday.

"The melting ice and other challenges we've encountered result from climate change. Countries need to tackle those negative impacts with joined hands, pursuing sustainable development, protecting biodiversity and preserving water resources."

A solid legislative framework has been built with the support of SCO members, Zhang said, emphasizing that each state should be respected in having its own agenda in implementing its commitment to the Paris climate accord.

At the session's opening ceremony, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said actions and regional cooperation need to be scaled up to strengthen capacities in responding and adapting to climate change.

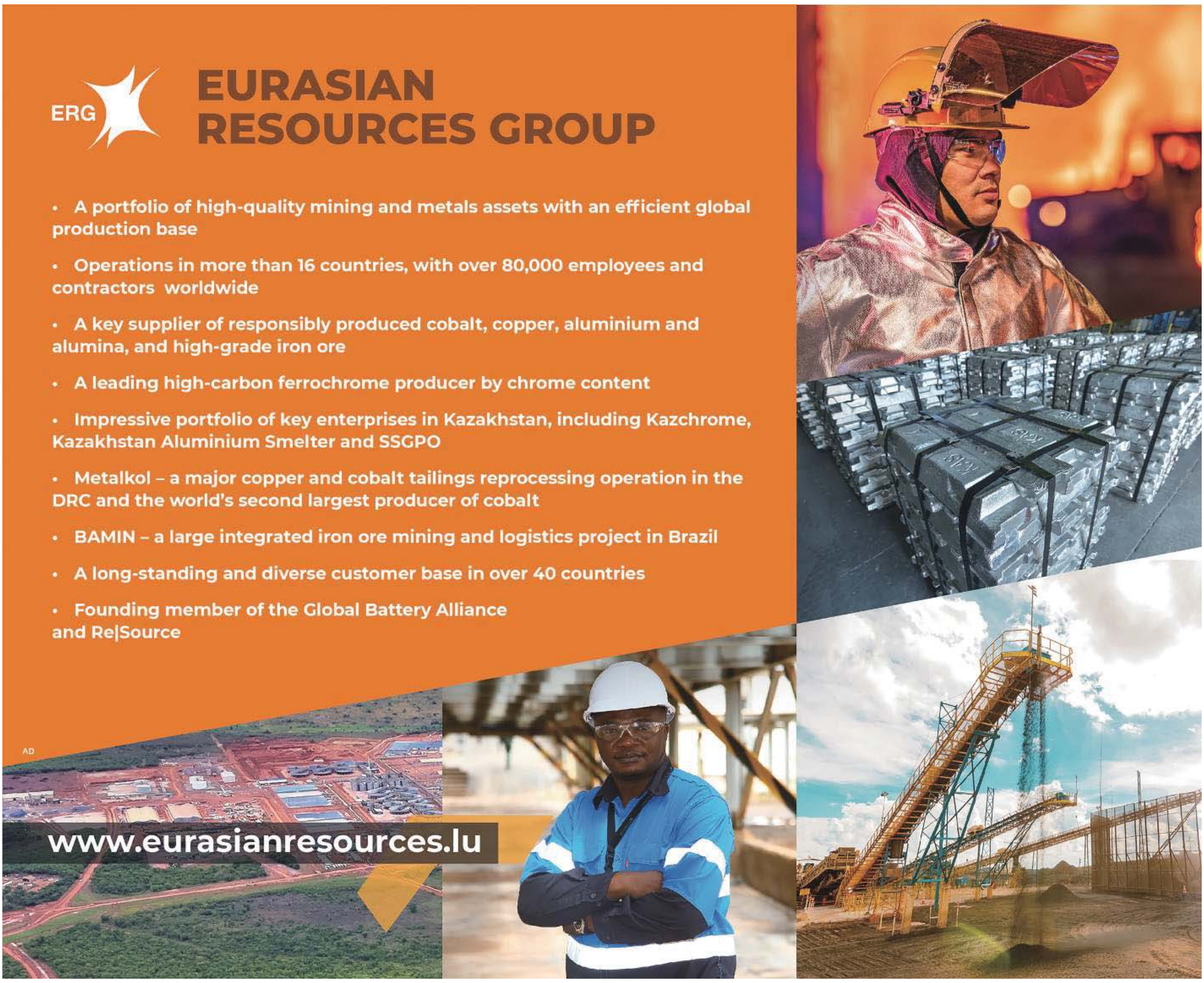
"ESCAP's work should be in synergy with and complement other regional and subregional cooperation frameworks. In addition, technology and innovation should be leveraged in climate actions," Prayut said, noting that health risk management and public health preparedness would help minimize the impact of climate change.

Fostering action

Under the theme "Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development", the session served as a platform for leaders to share solutions to both reduce the risks and effects of climate change and foster ambitious climate action toward net-zero pathways and limit the global temperature rise to no more than 1.5 C.

China in the past decade has listed ecological development as a major task in its overall plan and has proposed building a "beautiful China" as a grand goal for ecological progress. In 2012, Eco-civilization was included in the Constitution of the Communist Party of China as a principle for development.

More than 880 participants from 61 member states, associate members and permanent observers joined representatives from academia, international organizations, youth groups, and business and civil societies in attending the session.



WORLD

Pandemic eases but memories still haunt

By BELINDA ROBINSON in New York
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As the federal government declared this month that the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer a public health emergency in the US, New York, once the epicenter of the virus, is still dealing with the toll it took on residents.

More than 2 million New Yorkers suffered the death of a loved one attributed to COVID-19 within the first 16 months after the virus first hit the city.

At least 900,000 others lost at least three relatives or friends they were close to, data collected in mid-2021 for the New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey show.

Corky Lee, 73, a renowned photojournalist born and raised in Queens, New York, died from COVID-19 in January 2021.

The Asian American photographer spent decades documenting his community and its changes. This month, Google Doodle honored his work in celebration of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

Lee is among an estimated 80,450 residents of New York who have died from COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic in early March 2020 until May, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Half of those deaths occurred in New York City.

The deaths from the virus hit some communities harder than others. Several studies repeatedly showed that Hispanic and black people died from COVID-19 at higher levels than white people.

More than 5,200 Latinos in New York City died from COVID-19 up until May — according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene — higher than any other racial group.

The large number of deaths in those communities could be because many were essential workers.

Approximately 1.1 million people out of the city's 8.4 million residents were forced to go to work between March and June 2020 at the height of the spread of the virus, the survey showed. More than 800,000 of them were people of color.

Disparity in income

The data also show that a third of low-income workers had at least one relative die compared to just one-fourth of all other New Yorkers. An additional 16 percent of low-income workers lost three people they were close to, compared with 11 percent of all New Yorkers, the survey found.

Last year, COVID-19 was listed as the fourth leading cause of death in the US. It was the third leading cause of death in 2021 and 2022, data show.

"There's no doubt that we still must remain vigilant and take precautions, as I like to say we have to keep our guard up," William Schaffner, professor of preventive medicine and infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee, told China Daily. "COVID is not behind us. Yes, we have moved from the most intense pandemic phase where our healthcare system was almost paralyzed with COVID, to now a smoldering phase which we in public health call endemic."

New York Governor Kathy Hochul has also called on New Yorkers to "remain vigilant" against COVID-19.

This year, nearly 35,000 people nationwide have died from COVID-19, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Fire fighting

Residents attempt to stop the spread of a blaze that destroyed several shacks as it burned through a densely populated section of Masiphumelele in Cape Town, South Africa, on Tuesday. NIC BOTHMA / REUTERS

Travel becomes easier between Gulf states

Qatar-Bahrain ties thaw to strengthen collective action on foreign policy front

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Qatar and Bahrain's decision to mend fences will not only ease travel between the two countries but also strengthen the Gulf nations' collective action on the foreign policy front, said experts.

Bahrain Civil Aviation Affairs said the decision to resume flights between Bahrain and Qatar on May 25 "comes within the framework of the brotherly relations between the two brotherly countries and peoples" and "the common aspirations of the leadership and citizens of both countries", the Bahrain News Agency reported on Monday.

Umer Karim, an associate fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh, told China Daily that the Qatar-Bahrain rapprochement has been "probably the most difficult among the Gulf confrontations" due to the unique history between their royal families and the emergence of Qatar as an independent emirate.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Qatar in 2017, imposing sanctions and blockades, amid religious and geopolitical rows.

Qatar had been accused of backing terrorism, a charge it repeatedly denied. During a summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 2021, the grouping lifted the boycotts, gradually resuming links with Qatar. The GCC comprises Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman.

"The Qatar-Bahrain normalization will further pave the way for Gulf monarchies to act collectively on the foreign policy front and will end the decadelong confrontation between Gulf's royal houses," said Karim.

The pace of rapprochement among rivals in the Middle East has accelerated recently following a China-brokered peace deal between regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The resumption of travel links comes a month after the Qatari-Bahraini Follow-up Committee decided to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries in a meeting at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the GCC, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on April 12.

Stimulating competition

Jehad Amin, chairman of the Association of Bahrain Tour and Travel Agents, welcomed the developments. He believes that once Qatar Airways starts flying into Bahrain again, it will "stimulate competition to the benefit of the travelers, providing more options and better deals".

It would also mean the return of travel convenience for citizens of the two countries who have had to endure visa or route hurdles just to see their families.

"At one point, Bahrain citizens needed special permission to travel to Doha. Likewise, Qatari citizens required a visa or special permission to visit Bahrain. Approximately a year ago, these limitations were lifted, but travelers could only visit (by) transiting in Kuwait or Dubai. They could also drive either way through Saudi Arabia. That's around four hours' drive," Amin told China Daily.

When Qatar hosted the 2022 FIFA World Cup, flights between the two Arab nations remained suspended while citizens from Israel, which does not have diplomatic ties with Qatar, were allowed to fly in and watch the event.

Referring to Gulf Air's just-released airfares, Amin said: "The rates are approximately $300 for an economy class return ticket to Doha and $600 for a business class ticket. Those rates are expected to drop once Qatar Airways starts flying to Bahrain."

Gokhan Ereli, Gulf Studies coordinator at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Turkiye, told China Daily that the resumption of flights between Doha and Manama "can be read as a sign of goodwill provided by Doha to increase room for maneuver in Bahraini foreign policy".

"The decision to open flights again represents the completion of a missing point in the normalization processes in the Gulf.

"It also shows that Qatar wants to overcome the crisis period by building reciprocal confidence again in its bilateral relations, not directly but gradually, and provides room for the maneuver for Bahraini foreign policy, which is heavily under the regional influence of Saudi, Emirati and Israeli political circles," Ereli added.

Beef over husbandry

Cattle graze on the meadow on Tuesday in Berlin in front of the German parliament building, the Reichstag, during a protest for species-appropriate animal husbandry. MARKUS SCHREIBER / AP

Security tightened ahead of G7 meet as protests emerge

By WANG XU
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Hundreds of people gathered in Hiroshima as the Group of Seven countries prepare to hold their annual gathering in the city once decimated by a nuclear bomb dropped by the United States in Japan, which holds the rotating presidency this year.

According to police, tight security is in place in the lead-up to, during, and immediately after the summit, during which security forces may randomly search people and vehicles as a precautionary measure.

From the point of view of police, heightened security is a must considering the number of civic groups participating in recent and upcoming protests against the summit.

Meanwhile, recent domestic incidents targeting the incumbent and former prime ministers in Japan also kept them on high alert, although there have not been any publicized threats to the summit.

On Saturday and Sunday, over 200 citizens from different civic groups carrying banners reading "No G7" and "No War" rallied in Hiroshima as Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited the city to inspect summit venues. Their demands include a stop to the military buildup, a reversal in dumping Fukushima nuclear-contaminated water, and greater efforts to maintain regional peace instead of hyping up tensions.

Shigeo Kimoto, director of the Japanese civic group Peace Depot, said in a speech that both joint military exercises among G7 members in the Pacific region and Japan's statement that "any contingency for Taiwan is a contingency for Japan" are "absurd and dangerous".

"Japan is politically using Hiroshima, the site of the atomic bombing, to hold the G7 summit. It is time for people in Hiroshima to wake up," said Toshiyuki Tanaka, an emeritus professor at Hiroshima City University, adding that Japan, by repeatedly stressing that it is "the only country that suffered atomic bombings", is deliberately whitewashing its history as an invader and perpetrator.

In a statement by Citizen's Group Questioning the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, the civic group said that the G7 summit in Hiroshima only seeks to advance military alliance under the name of freedom and democracy, and the summit is essentially a meeting where the rich bloc forces other countries to follow its rules.

Provocation slammed

Concerning recent negative messages targeting China by the Japanese prime minister, Beijing on Tuesday slammed Tokyo saying Kishida is "obsessed with provoking and creating bloc confrontation to harm regional interests".

Japan has been attempting to change the status quo by conniving with some of its domestic forces to embellish its aggression history, to whitewash militarism and even to advocate "any contingency for Taiwan is a contingency for Japan", as the Potsdam Proclamation and the Cairo Declaration clearly say that the returning of the Taiwan region to China is an integral part of the post-World War II international order, said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin.

"If Japan is truly against 'unilateral change to the status quo', one thing it can do is to stop those within Japan trying to turn back the wheel of history, draw serious lessons from the history of Japan's militarist aggression, recommit itself to the postwar international order and adhere to the one-China principle," Wang said.

Security personnel carry barricades at a checkpoint in Hiroshima on Wednesday ahead of the G7 Leaders' Summit. PHILIP FONG / AFP

Safety issues hamper relief efforts in Sudan

By WANG XIAODONG in Nairobi, Kenya
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The humanitarian situation in Sudan is "quickly deteriorating" as a month of intense fighting brings dire consequences, according to a Red Cross official, who called for improved security for humanitarian workers delivering aid.

"Civilians trapped in Khartoum are facing serious food and water shortages, as are hundreds of thousands of people who fled their homes," Alyona Synenko, spokesperson in Africa for the International Committee of the Red Cross, said in an interview with China Daily.

"Many people don't know what happened to their loved ones. The few functioning hospitals are running critically low on essential supplies, and many dead bodies are yet to be collected and identified."

The ICRC has been engaged in humanitarian relief in the capital Khartoum and other areas including delivering emergency medical supplies, repairing damaged critical infrastructure such as power and water plants, and providing body bags for volunteers to collect mortal remains, she said. However, such efforts are often hampered by insecurity and are far from enough to meet demand.

Fighting between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces has led to almost 1 million people fleeing their homes and seeking refuge in other parts of the country and neighboring states, according to the International Rescue Committee.

The exact number of deaths caused by the conflict is unknown. On Tuesday, the Sudanese Doctors Union, an NGO, said 822 civilians had died due to armed clashes, with over 3,200 injured.

However, the actual death toll is expected to be higher as many bodies left outside hospitals are not identified or registered. Corpses are lining roads in Khartoum, spreading an awful smell, according to Dabanga, a Sudanese news service.

Despite the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces signing a commitment to protect civilians last week, fighting has been reported in recent days, causing problems for humanitarian relief.

Emergency response

Despite growing demand, the ICRC and other aid organizations have not had the necessary security conditions to conduct emergency response operations at the scale needed to assist and protect people affected by violence, with reports of direct threats and attacks against medical and humanitarian personnel, said Synenko.

In addition to the ongoing efforts, Synenko said ICRC personnel need to carry out more urgent humanitarian work including reestablishing contact with the many families separated while fleeing Khartoum or Darfur.

Alfonso Verdu Perez, head of the ICRC delegation in Sudan, said: "As a humanitarian worker, I'm frustrated to see such suffering and not be able to provide aid at the scale and speed needed. Facilitating humanitarian work is an obligation, … the urgency grows each day."

Chinese universities gain momentum in global rankings

By JONATHAN POWELL in London
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Almost every Chinese university moved up in this year's global rankings, as the nation continues to invest heavily in creating more elite institutions of higher education.

Ninety-six percent of Chinese universities advanced in the latest standings, including all nine schools in the C9 League, the country's equivalent of the Ivy League. Tsinghua University was the highest placed at No 44.

The top three colleges this year were Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford in the United States followed by Cambridge and Oxford in the United Kingdom, according to the Centre for World University Rankings, or CWUR.

Though US colleges secured eight of the top 10 spots, 80 percent of its universities dropped down in the latest rankings. Nearly 60 percent of the UK's top universities also fell as they battle to retain their global prestige.

China's Double First-Class University Plan, aimed at creating a group of elite universities with esteemed disciplines by 2050, is putting pressure on the US and the UK, The Times of London newspaper reported.

Researchers at CWUR, based in the United Arab Emirates, said the UK's position has diminished due to increased competition in international markets.

"While the results of this year's study confirm that the UK has an outstanding higher education system, the broader story for the nation is concerning," said Nadim Mahassen, CWUR president.

CWUR ranks universities according to their quality of education and faculty, graduate employability and research output. British universities performed poorly in areas including research and the number of graduates taking executive roles at major companies.

Irene Tracey, vice-chancellor of Oxford University, told The Daily Telegraph newspaper that "significant investment and support given by countries like China" was the likely reason for some UK institutions falling in the rankings.

"We are in a global race, and unless we meet this challenge, UK universities' position as a science powerhouse and a key export is at risk," she said.

This year's rankings included 20,531 universities worldwide, with 95 countries represented in the Global 2,000 list. The US accounted for 16 of the top 20 universities. In the UK, University College London, Imperial College London and King's College London all featured in the Global 100 behind Cambridge and Oxford.

WORLD

Debt row trims Biden's Asia trip

US leader limps into truncated journey amid crisis expected to tear up global economy

Activists walk through the halls of the House Cannon Office Building in Washington on Tuesday to protest against allowing the US to default on its debt. LEAH MILLIS / REUTERS

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden and opposition Republican leaders on Tuesday offered hope of a deal that could avoid a catastrophic debt default in the United States, although the president was forced to shorten an upcoming Asia-Pacific tour for further crisis talks.

After the latest negotiations ended without a breakthrough, Republican House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy told reporters there was still "a lot of work to do" to break the high-stakes standoff with Democrat Biden over the borrowing limit.

While start differences remained, the White House said Biden was "optimistic that there is a path to a responsible, bipartisan budget agreement if both sides negotiate in good faith".

The US president — who was scheduled to arrive in Japan on Thursday for a G7 summit — scrapped subsequent stops in Papua New Guinea and Australia, instead returning to Washington on Sunday.

Canceling the Papua New Guinea and Australia stops will have been a bitter pill for a president who has reinvigorated US diplomacy after the isolationist Trump years, Agence France-Presse commented.

For Biden, 80, the trip and the debt ceiling mess come at a crucial time. He has just launched his reelection campaign and Americans wary about his age are watching how he copes in the furnace of the presidency at home and abroad.

In Washington, the Treasury has warned of grim consequences if the country runs out of cash to pay its bills, which would leave it unable to pay federal workers and trigger a likely surge in interest rates with knock-on effects for businesses, mortgages — and global markets.

The US could begin defaulting on its debts "potentially as early as June 1," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Monday, while the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has forecast June 15.

The White House said Biden had directed his staff "to continue to meet daily on outstanding issues", and that he would confer with Republican leaders on his return from the G7 meetings.

Republicans have continued to insist Biden agree to significant spending cuts in exchange for their support to raise the debt ceiling, ignoring Democratic calls for a "clean" increase of the borrowing limit with no strings attached.

Democrats have accused Republicans of using extreme tactics to push their agenda ahead of the so-called "X-date" at which the United States starts defaulting on its debts.

In a sign of growing nervousness over what would be the first-ever US debt default, more than 140 top US chief executives sent a letter to Biden and congressional leaders stressing the need for an agreement.

Devastating scenario

"We strongly urge that an accord be reached quickly so that the country can avert this potentially devastating scenario," the letter, signed by CEOs of Pfizer and Morgan Stanley, among others, said.

Republicans, who regained control of the House in the 2022 midterm elections, are using their newfound clout to demand cuts of $130 billion from federal agencies and programs in exchange for support for lifting the debt ceiling.

This would limit spending in the 2024 fiscal year to 2022 levels.

They also want to expedite domestic energy production projects, simplify the process for obtaining permits for pipelines and refineries and claw back unspent COVID-19 relief funding.

There are now only three days remaining when the House and Senate are both in session before June 1 — the day the Treasury predicts the country could run out of money.

As the X-date draws closer, Democrats in Congress have begun considering a range of alternatives, including using an arcane congressional procedure to bypass McCarthy.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

ChatGPT chief urges strict regulations on AI

By AI HEPING in New York
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Sam Altman, CEO of the San Francisco startup OpenAI that developed ChatGPT, his company's chatbot tool, on Tuesday urged US lawmakers to regulate artificial intelligence.

The latest figure to erupt from Silicon Valley, Altman's first testimony in front of a US Senate judiciary subcommittee was far from the testy grilling given to the bosses of Facebook or TikTok when they visited Washington.

"We think that regulatory intervention by governments will be critical to mitigate the risks of increasingly powerful models. My worst fears are that we cause significant — we, the field, the technology industry — cause significant harm to the world," Altman said.

"I think if this technology goes wrong, it can go quite wrong, and we want to be vocal about that," Altman added. "We want to work with the government to prevent that from happening."

The 38-year-old Stanford University dropout said the potential for AI to be used to manipulate voters and target disinformation are among "my areas of greatest concern", especially because "we're going to face an election next year and these models are getting better".

Altman said his company's technology may destroy some jobs but also create new ones and that it will be important for "government to figure out how we want to mitigate that".

Altman said the government could regulate the industry by creating an agency that issues licenses for the creation of large-scale AI models, safety regulations and tests that AI models must pass before being released to the public.

This "combination of licensing and testing requirements," he said, could be applied to the "development and release of AI models above a threshold of capabilities".

> I think if this technology goes wrong, it can go quite wrong, and we want to be vocal about that. We want to work with the government to prevent that from happening."
>
> **Sam Altman,** CEO of OpenAI

In the United States, lawmakers brought up the idea of an independent agency to oversee AI, rules that force companies to disclose how their models work and the data sets they use and antitrust rules to prevent companies like Microsoft and Google from monopolizing the nascent industry.

The rapid development of ChatGPT with an estimated 100 million users within two months has sparked an industry race, with Microsoft, an investor in OpenAI, enabling ChatGPT in the Windows operating system and Google adding its own so-called generative AI systems, including one called Bard, to its app.

The latest forms of AI also have drawn criticism from some of tech's biggest names for their potential to disrupt millions of jobs, spread misinformation and perpetuate biases.

Altman said OpenAI pretests and constantly updates its tools to ensure safety and that making them widely available to the public actually helps the company identify and mitigate risks.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Germany admits West's double standards

By EARLE GALE in London
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Western nations must do better at establishing equal relations with developing countries, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said as he acknowledged a perception of double standards in the West's response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

He told delegates at a Global Solutions Forum on Monday, which had inclusivity and sustainability as its focus, that developing countries are often left with a sense that the West has double standards and does not apply its principles evenly.

While the West has been critical of Russia over the Russia-Ukraine conflict, he said countries, including India, Vietnam and South Africa, have been more nuanced in their response.

"When I talk to leaders from those countries, many assure me that they are not questioning the underlying principles of our international order. What they are struggling with is the unequal application of those principles," he said in a speech at the event, which is held annually and aims to find research-based solutions for problems facing the G20, G7 and other international organizations.

"What they expect is representation on equal terms, and an end to Western double standards," German state broadcaster Deutsche Welle, or DW, quoted him as saying.

Scholz has, however, been a strong critic of Russia over the Russia-Ukraine conflict and a staunch supporter of Kyiv.

On Sunday, during a visit to his country by Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, he vowed to support Ukraine "for as long as it is necessary" and promised to send additional armaments.

On Tuesday, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte pledged to build an "international coalition" to provide fighter jet support for Ukraine.

Security pact exited

Meanwhile, Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, voted unanimously to formally pull out of a key Cold War-era security deal.

"Deputies of the State Duma, guided by the interests of our citizens, decided to denounce the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe to ensure the security of the Russian Federation," said Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin.

"Washington and Brussels, obsessed with the idea of building a unipolar world and expanding NATO to the east, have destroyed the global security system," Volodin wrote in a Telegram post.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

Chic jaunt

A worker poses with a robe that belonged to Empress Dowager Cixi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) before the *China's Hidden Century* exhibition at the British Museum in London on Tuesday. As more than 300 exquisite objects are brought together for the first time, visitors can glimpse the textures of life in 19th-century China through art, fashion, furniture — even soup ingredients. PA WIRE

Briefly

FRANCE

Ex-president Sarkozy loses corruption appeal

Former president Nicolas Sarkozy lost his appeal against a 2021 conviction for corruption and influence peddling at the Paris Court of Appeals on Wednesday. The court upheld a three-year prison sentence. It said two of those years were suspended and that Sarkozy would wear an electronic bracelet instead of going to jail for the remaining year. A lower court in 2021 had found Sarkozy guilty of trying to bribe a judge after leaving office.

INDIA

Hooch tragedy death toll rises to 20

The death toll in the recent hooch tragedy in the southern state of Tamil Nadu has risen to 20, an official said on Wednesday. More than 30 people are undergoing treatment in hospitals. The victims possibly consumed liquor that contained a mixture of ethanol-methanol and other chemical substances, a senior police officer said.

NEPAL

Guide sets Qomolangma record with 27th ascent

A Nepali sherpa guide scaled Qomolangma, also known in the West as Mount Everest, for a record 27th time on Wednesday, beating his own record. Kami Rita, 53, scaled the 8,849-meter mountain early in the morning along the traditional southeast ridge route, guiding a foreign climber, officials said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

HIGHER GROUND

Policies help stabilize home prices

By WANG KEJU
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China's housing market, buoyed by a flurry of supportive policies, has continued to stabilize in April, as evidenced by major cities logging sustained rise in home prices from the previous month, officials and analysts said on Wednesday.

While the property sector is on track toward a steady recovery, there is still uncertainty over whether it can sustain the strength of the momentum or not. Relevant policy steps should be fine-tuned and intensified to further bolster consumer sentiment and unlock housing demand, they said.

The latest official data showed that in April, 62 out of the 70 large and medium-sized cities tracked by the National Bureau of Statistics saw month-on-month increases in new home prices. The corresponding figure in March was a tad higher at 64.

First-tier cities reported a 0.4 percent increase on a monthly basis in their new home prices, NBS data showed. New housing in second- and third-tier cities saw prices rise 0.4 percent and 0.2 percent, respectively.

Overall, the month-on-month rise in new home prices in the 70 major cities, however, slowed a bit in April compared with March, said Sheng Guoqing, chief statistician of the NBS' urban division.

The average price of new homes in 70 major cities edged up 0.32 percent in April, down 0.12 percentage point from a month earlier, said Yan Yuejin, director of the Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution. The calculations were based on NBS data, he said.

The overall trend of stabilization and recovery in the housing market remains unchanged as favorable government policies restored confidence. The slow-paced recovery last month was mainly attributable to relatively weak willingness among prospective homebuyers to buy residential properties as the pent-up demand was mostly unleashed in the first quarter, Yan said.

Data from the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, showed that household loans contracted by 241.1 billion yuan ($34.5 billion) in April compared with the same period last year while such loans rose by 1.24 trillion yuan in March over March 2022. Short-term loans to households dropped by 125.5 billion yuan in April from a year earlier, and medium- and long-term loans decreased by 115.6 billion yuan.

Chen Wenjing, director of research with the China Index Academy, said that market expectations are not fully established, and consumer sentiment still remains relatively weak as the property sector recovery faces uncertainty.

There is room for policy relaxation both on the supply and demand sides, and localities and departments concerned should optimize their real estate measures at a faster pace, she said, adding that new home sales in May are expected to maintain an appropriate scale and register a year-on-year increase.

The PBOC said on Monday in its first-quarter monetary policy report that the dynamic adjustment mechanism on mortgage rates for first-time homebuyers will be exercised on an ongoing basis in a bid to further support the property sector.

For cities where the selling prices of new homes fall month-on-month and year-on-year for three consecutive months, the floor on mortgage rates can be lowered or abolished for first-time homebuyers in phases.

Meanwhile, 36 out of the 70 major Chinese cities posted month-on-month increases in pre-owned home prices, down from 57 in March, NBS data showed. Pre-owned home prices in first-tier cities edged up 0.2 percent from a month ago, but stayed flat in second- and third-tier cities.

Sheng of the NBS said that pre-owned home prices also saw a slower month-on-month growth in April compared to March.

Yan of E-house said housing supply, especially in the pre-owned home segment, has been on the rise lately, which might stem a price rally. Proactive steps like lowering tax costs and brokerage fees should be taken to further vitalize the pre-owned home market and ensure its sound operation.

Homebuyers look at property models in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Demand, credit key to growth now

With CPI stable, manufacturing, consumption and investment in focus

By ZHANG YUE
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Recovery and expansion of the still-weak demand are critical to lifting China's economic growth, with more credit getting funneled into the manufacturing sector, improving the consumption supply system, officials and experts said on Wednesday.

Meng Wei, a spokeswoman for the National Development and Reform Commission, said at a news conference that April figures for the manufacturing sector — China's official manufacturing purchasing managers' index declined to 49.2 in April from 51.9 in March, sliding into contraction territory — showed that demand has to recover and expand further to help keep industrial growth stable.

The manufacturing PMI in April, however, indicates that current market demand remains insufficient, and internal momentum for development has yet to improve, she said.

There are several bright spots among the April manufacturing sub-indexes, despite the PMI decline, Meng said.

For instance, the sub-index for expectations of business operations came in at a relatively high level of 54.7 in April. This indicates that businesses are exhibiting stable confidence in recent market developments.

Industry-wise, indexes of a number of sectors like telecommunications, agriculture, food processing, railways, shipping and aerospace equipment all rose, showing strong market expectations.

"Going forward, we will work to unleash consumption potential further and create a high-quality consumption supply system," Meng said.

"New efforts will be made to stabilize and expand investment in manufacturing. The role of special local government bonds, funds under the central government budget and structural adjustments to monetary policy will be better harnessed. Efforts will also be made to keep increasing medium- and long-term loans to manufacturing, in order to ensure high growth of the sector."

In the first four months, the NDRC approved and confirmed 56 fixed asset investment projects totaling 378.4 billion yuan ($54 billion), she said.

Regarding the fall in price growth in April, Meng said such a slowdown is partly imported and can be mainly attributed to cyclical and seasonal factors.

"The fall was particularly affected by the high base over the same period last year. In addition, the prices of some commodities have fallen more sharply year-on-year in April, pulling down the overall consumer price index," she said. "Such a phenomenon is provisional and time-limited."

China's consumer price index rose 0.1 percent in April year-on-year, the slowest pace of rise since early 2021.

Issuing monthly economic data on Tuesday, the NBS said that deflation is not evident in China at present and will not appear in the next stage either.

Gao Ruidong, chief macroeconomist at Everbright Securities, said going forward, there will not be any significant steps in terms of macroeconomic policy easing.

"But new efforts will be made to consolidate the efficacy of current policy incentives and roll out more targeted support for key areas and weak links," he said.

Economic regulator to push NEVs in rural areas

By ZHENG XIN
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China aims to enhance the layout and construction of public charging infrastructure in rural areas to promote green transportation among local residents, the top economic regulator said on Wednesday.

Local governments should step up distribution and construction of public charging infrastructure, according to a document on accelerating the construction of new energy vehicle charging infrastructure in rural areas, jointly released by the National Energy Administration and the National Development and Reform Commission, on Wednesday.

Local governments should also further promote smart charging models and intelligent technologies such as vehicle-to-grid or V2G technology, which allows vehicle batteries to return power to the grid when demand is high, to further develop the NEV charging pile industry, the document stated.

The NDRC said it will encourage NEV enterprises to optimize their offerings and develop more economically practical vehicle models, including new energy cargo micro-vans, micro-trucks and light trucks, while providing high-quality used NEVs to the rural market.

China has established the world's largest charging infrastructure system in terms of quantity and coverage area, providing strong support for the rapid development of NEVs in recent years, said the commission.

However, there are still some rough edges in rural areas that need to be smoothened, like insufficient construction of public charging infrastructure, difficulties in installing and sharing charging facilities in residential communities and imbalances between supply and demand during certain periods. These issues have crimped NEV consumption potential in rural areas, it said.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, said there is vast potential for NEV growth in rural China and the initiative is expected to boost consumption in such areas.

The potential for promoting NEVs in rural areas might be greater than in large cities as China is an aging society with enormous opportunities presented by the development of NEVs for middle-aged and elderly people, Cui said.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said despite having the world's largest and most widely distributed network of charging facilities, with 6.09 million charging facilities nationwide as of April, the biggest concern for NEV buyers remains the inconvenience of charging.

The rural population and vehicles are more widely spread out, while issues such as difficulty in installing charging stations in some residential areas also pose challenges to installing sufficient charging infrastructure in rural regions, he said.

Drivers charge their electric vehicles at a charging facility in Tongren, Guizhou province. HU PANXUE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Yuyao to hold Robotop summit on May 23-25

More than 70 projects are expected to be signed at the 8th China Robotop and Intelligent Economic Talents Summit to be held in Yuyao in East China's Zhejiang province, from May 23 to 25. The three-day event will focus on the core technology and application of robots as well as the digitalization of the industry. More than 1,200 participants, including a number of high-level academicians, will attend the summit.

Hunan sees robust growth in foreign trade

Foreign trade in Hunan province grew robustly in the first four months of 2023, the Customs in Changsha, the provincial capital, said. Foreign trade value touched 243.65 billion yuan ($35 billion) from January to April, up 49.6 percent year-on-year. The export value increased by 58.7 percent year-on-year to 172.93 billion yuan, while imports rose 31.1 percent year-on-year to 70.71 billion yuan, it said.

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank continued to inject funds into the financial system through open market operations on Wednesday. The People's Bank of China said it has conducted 2 billion yuan ($286.7 million) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 2 percent.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Lenovo to prime supply chains, digital quotient to up efficiency

By MA SI
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Lenovo Group Ltd, the world's largest personal computer maker by shipments, will enhance its supply chains and leverage digital technologies to make its manufacturing process more efficient and resilient, Chairman and Chief Executive Yang Yuanqing said on Wednesday.

The PC maker's factory in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, became operational earlier this month after an investment of 2 billion yuan ($285.8 million).

Lenovo has expanded and strengthened its global manufacturing footprint in the past three years, adding three manufacturing sites — in Tianjin, Shenzhen and Budapest, Yang said at the company's global suppliers conference in Tianjin.

"China is at a critical stage of moving from being a manufacturing powerhouse to a smart-manufacturing center, which will generate more opportunities," Yang said.

The company has established a stable relationship with 5,000 global suppliers and this sprawling supply chain network reflects the importance of international cooperation in manufacturing, he said.

According to Yang, Lenovo has turned the COVID-19 pandemic crisis into an opportunity for growth — its revenue grew from $50 billion three years ago to $70 billion in fiscal year 2022.

Lenovo's Shenzhen factory has an annual production capacity of over 16 million units, which include PCs, computer servers and smart wearable devices. This can drive upstream and downstream companies to create about 100,000 jobs, the company said. The factory is capable of manufacturing over 50 product categories with nearly 100,000 product configurations and these are shipped to over 180 countries and regions.

Lenovo's "intelligent manufacturing" plan dovetails with China's growing emphasis on advanced manufacturing, an area of intensified global competition among major economies.

China will scale up lending toward the manufacturing sector to ensure high-quality growth, said Meng Wei, a spokeswoman for the National Development and Reform Commission, at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

In March, Minister of Industry and Information Technology Jin Zhuanglong said China will speed up efforts to transform and upgrade traditional industries that play a vital role in building a modern industrial system, and move the manufacturing sector toward higher-end, smarter and greener production.

China will continue to play a central role in the global supply chain, and its industrial chains have improved significantly as domestic and foreign companies invest heavily in modernizing their local production systems, said Denis Depoux, global managing director of consultancy Roland Berger, in a previous interview with China Daily.

Lenovo, for instance, has jumped seven places in a year to No 9 on its list of Global Supply Chain Top 25 for 2022, US market research company Gartner said.

Lenovo's factory in Hefei, Anhui province, has also been recognized as a lighthouse factory by the World Economic Forum. The Global Lighthouse Network is a community of production sites that are seen as world leaders in the adoption and integration of cutting-edge technologies.

> China is at a critical stage of moving from being a manufacturing powerhouse to a smart-manufacturing center ..."
>
> **Yang Yuanqing,** chairman and chief executive of Lenovo

BUSINESS

Medical firms eye BRI for biz expansion

Exports of medicine, health products to stabilize in H2 on demand recovery

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Major Chinese medicine and health product manufacturers are expected to further expand sales in the markets related to the Belt and Road Initiative this year, especially those on manufacturing innovative medical equipment, industry observers said.

In the first quarter of this year, the total value of medicines and health products exported from China reached $26.3 billion, down 31.42 percent year-on-year, according to the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Medicines and Health Products (CCCMHPIE) on Wednesday.

Of the total, exports of traditional Chinese medicines edged up 3.43 percent year-on-year, reaching $1.45 billion, while the exports of Western medicines and medical equipment reached $13.79 billion and $11.05 billion, dropping 18.93 percent and 44.53 percent on a yearly basis, respectively, according to the chamber, which is affiliated to the Ministry of Commerce.

"In the latter half of the year, the exports of medicines and health products are expected to stabilize and gradually rebound with the recovery of the global economy. The foreign trade of medicines and health products is expected to return to a normal development stage similar to the pre-COVID-19 period," said Yu Meng, deputy director of the information department at the chamber.

"China's products, such as the raw materials for Western medicines and small and medium-sized medical equipment, will maintain their advantageous positions in exports, while more innovative medical equipment is expected to be exported overseas," Yu said.

Since the COVID outbreak, the export of China's pandemic prevention equipment has played a significant role in fighting the virus. With such demand weakening globally, the foreign trade of medicines and health products is expected to return to normalcy.

The export of pandemic prevention equipment had a profound impact on foreign trade during the different stages of the pandemic, and the export of medicines and health products fluctuated periodically, the CCCMHPIE said.

In 2022, the United States, India and Germany stood as the top three recipients of China's exports of medicines and health products and together accounted for some 30 percent of the total export value, data from the CCCMHPIE showed.

In terms of regions, the European Union, the US and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations came in as the top three destinations for China's exports of medicines and health products last year.

Particularly, in 2022, China's export value of medicines and health products to the EU reached $28.95 billion, down 10.66 percent year-on-year. The export values to the US and ASEAN achieved $21.33 billion and $13.68 billion, declining 21.21 percent and 18.73 percent year-on-year, respectively.

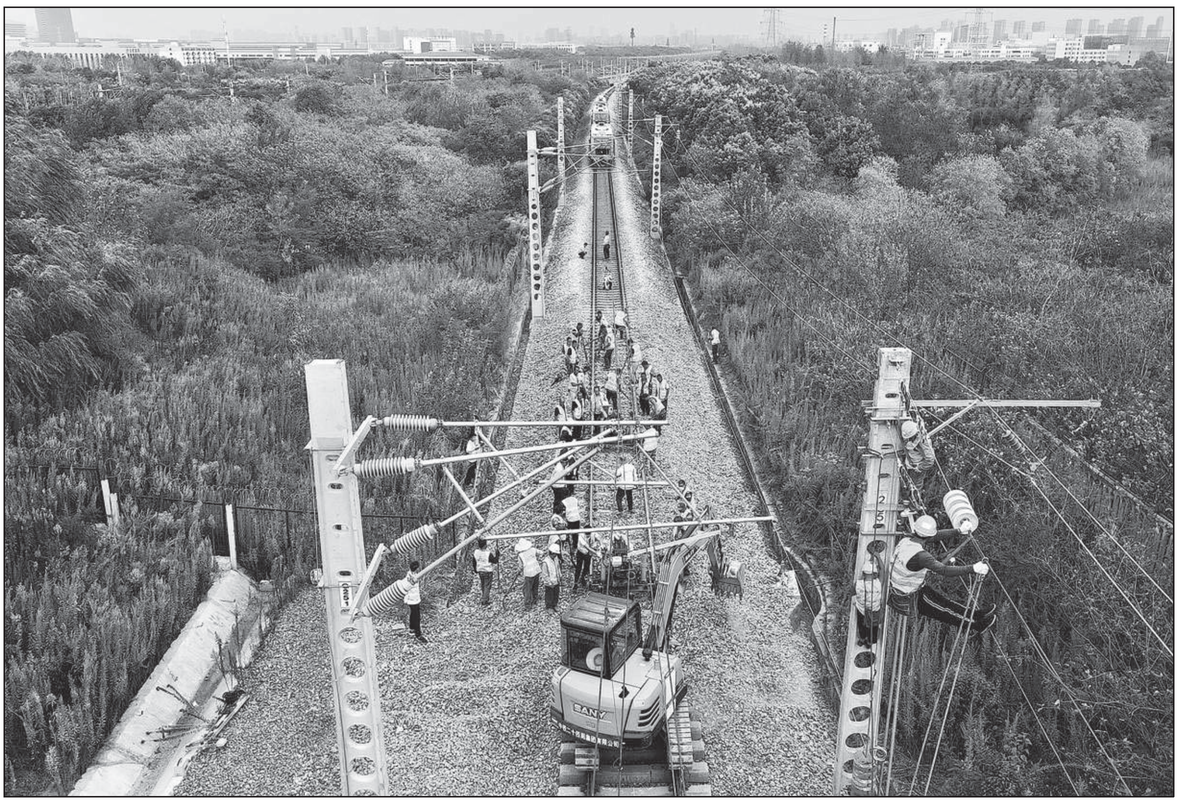
In the past few years, several major Chinese pharmaceutical companies have expanded their presence in the markets involved in the BRI. From 2019 to 2021, North China Pharmaceutical Group Corp sold its products in 32 countries related to the BRI, and its antibiotics and vitamins saw huge demand in Africa.

Chinese pharmaceutical company Luye Pharma Group Ltd sold its medical products like central nervous system medicine to emerging markets in Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, the Shenyang, Liaoning province-based enterprise Neusoft Medical Systems has provided comprehensive medical diagnostic services for many years. It has established a subsidiary in Dubai and provided medical services in more than 10 countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt.

"The new round of medical infrastructure construction globally has created new opportunities for Chinese companies. With high-quality products and comprehensive service systems, some companies have reached more high-end customers in overseas markets," Yu said.

"Still, with some international uncertainties remaining, such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Sino-US trade tensions, many countries have further strengthened their local medical industrial chains, intensifying competition," he said.



Builders of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd, a unit of China Railway Construction Corp Ltd, work on a rail renovation project in Hefei, Anhui province. LIU JUNXI / XINHUA

Major listed contractors report robust Q1 results as nation ramps up infrastructure investment

By ZHUANG QIANGE
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Amid nationwide efforts to step up the momentum of economic recovery, some major listed contractors saw a surge in order value and numbers in the first quarter, buoyed by the expanding effective investment in infrastructure during the same period.

According to China State Railway Group Co Ltd, the national railway operator, the fixed asset investment in railways nationwide increased 6.3 percent year-on-year to 167.4 billion yuan ($23.9 billion) in the first four months — a record-high figure for the period — exceeding the pre-COVID-19 level of 162.3 billion yuan in the same period of 2019.

Against such backdrop, China's major transportation infrastructure developers China Railway Group Ltd (CREC) and China Railway Construction Corp Ltd (CRCC) — both listed on the Shanghai Stock Exchange — reported double-digit growth in new orders and order value in the first three months of this year.

According to reports recently unveiled by the two companies, the new contract value of CREC and CRCC in the first quarter reached 667.38 billion yuan and 539.63 billion yuan, up 10.2 percent and 15.82 percent year-on-year, respectively.

In particular, CRCC said in the report that, of the total new contract value, the value of new projects reached 397.69 billion yuan, soaring 41.66 percent year-on-year, which the company attributed to the surge in orders for projects including railways, highways, municipal engineering, and water transport and conservancy during the reporting period.

539.63 billion yuan
new contract value of China Railway Construction Corp Ltd in the first quarter

"As the support from the policy side remains relatively strong, the scale of government investment will be no less than that in 2022, and the effective investment is expected to stay on a growth track this year, with the main focus on major infrastructure projects due to its driving role in industrial chains," said Zhang Yiqun, deputy director of the China Special Committee on Budget Performance.

Enterprises in fields such as water conservancy and transportation will step up pace in promoting existing projects and launching new projects with better funding, as the robust growth seen in the sector will bring bigger social capital inflow, Zhang said.

According to a report last week by China Securities Co Ltd, the country's recovery still relies heavily on efforts to expand domestic demand, in which infrastructure investment plays a significant role. The sector will remain a major focus of macroeconomic policies this year.

The report also expects the annual growth of the sector to remain at a relatively high level of around 10 percent this year, with most spending seen in projects such as urban buildings, transportation and green infrastructure.

Shares of CREC rose 0.64 percent to 7.88 yuan on Thursday, while those of CRCC edged down 0.19 percent to 10.58 yuan.

Recently, many provinces nationwide reported stronger infrastructure investment in their first-quarter economic results.

For example, in East China's Fujian province, road and waterway transportation investment reached 28.9 billion yuan in the first quarter, accounting for 28.9 percent of the annual target. As of the end of March, 21 projects commenced construction, exceeding the planned number, the provincial transportation department said.

Zhejiang province, which neighbors Fujian, also posted a higher fixed-asset investment during the same period, rising 9.1 percent year-on-year, with infrastructure investment up 4.4 percent.

China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd (CR24), a CRCC unit, said its projects nationwide have witnessed faster progress recently.

The State contractor said its construction workers in Cixi, a county-level city in Zhejiang, successfully completed the pouring of a basement slab on a school project.

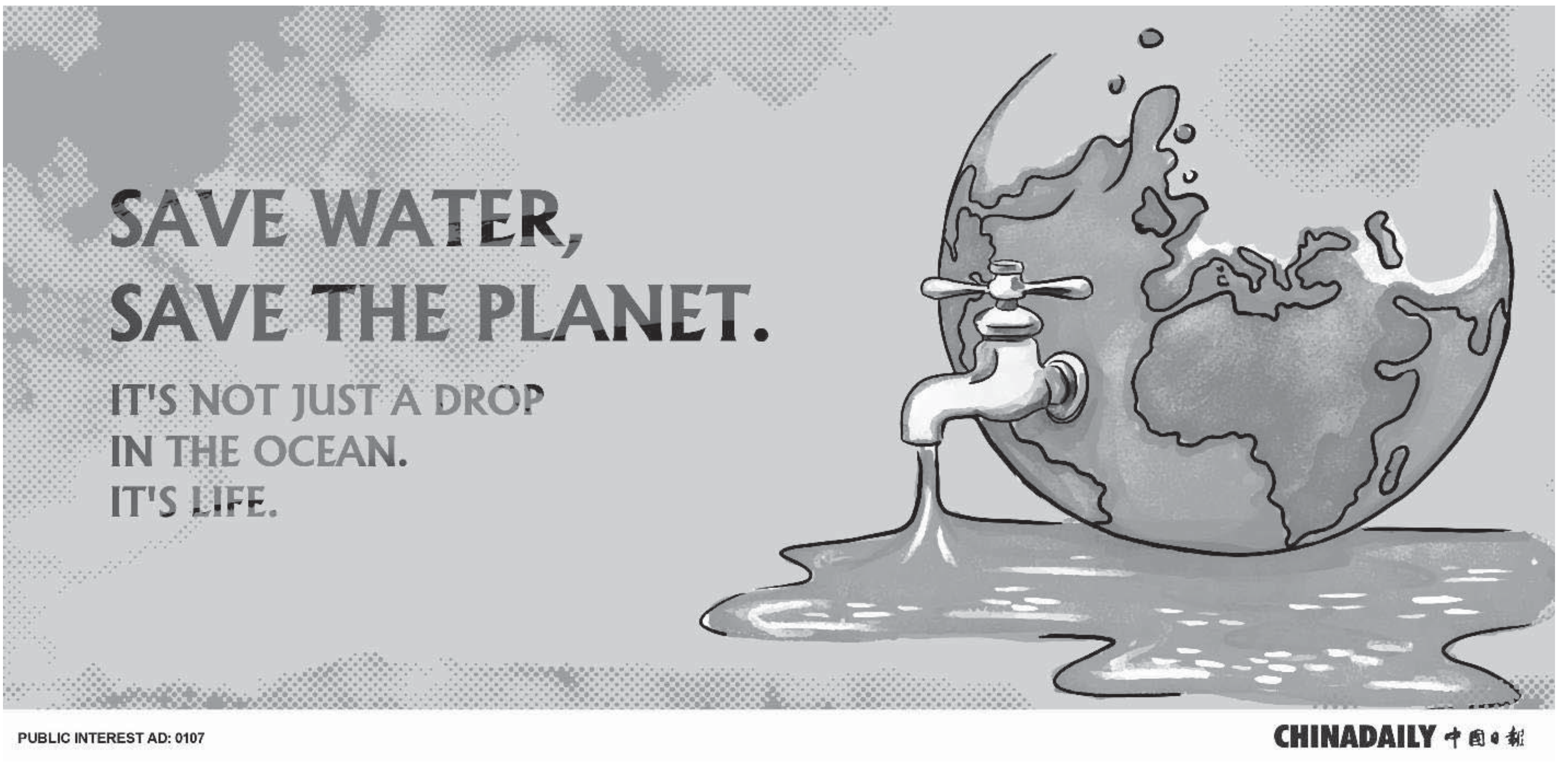
Covering 46,227 square meters, the school project will shoulder the nine-year education of more than 2,400 students after completion and is listed as a key infrastructure project in Cixi's five-year development plan.

Considering its significance to local livelihoods, CR24 said its builders were trained to "hold firmly to principles of safety and quality" during construction to ensure the scheduled completion.

The project team routinely held on-site observation and exchange meetings to ensure smooth construction and promote strict management, said the CR24 project manager, who declined to be named.

"With adequate labor supply and smoother logistics since the beginning of this year, we are confident in accomplishing the project on time," he said.

Chinese stocks closed lower on Wednesday, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index falling 0.21 percent to 3284.23. The Shenzhen Component Index closed 0.07 percent lower at 11091.08.



BUSINESS FOCUS

Taiping set to regain past glory as chocolate township

Binhai New Area vows to become biggest producer of cocoa treats despite headwinds

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin
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Taiping township in North China's municipality of Tianjin looks to become the country's major chocolate production township, said Liu Shaoyong, the township's Party chief.

Located in the city's coastal Binhai New Area, the township, once a leading production center of delicious treats made from cocoa in the 1990s, vows to regain its past glory.

To this end, Taiping plans to upgrade its industrial scale, optimize its industrial chains and establish chocolate-themed scenery spots, benefiting from its coastal scenery advantages, he said.

It also plans to offer programs combining chocolate production with do-it-yourself experiences for visitors.

It is now in close collaboration with the Bohai Urban Planning and Design Institute to map out a blueprint for the chocolate township.

"In the 1990s, the township was home to more than 200 chocolate producers — a 'sweet' memory for North China people — during their wedding banquets or grand celebration ceremonies; the chocolate from Taiping was indispensable," he said.

However, it lost its strength in the past decade, with shutdown waves of small companies in the local villages due to foreign counterparts' stronger foray into the Chinese market.

Currently, a total of 19 chocolate producers are nestled in Taiping, with a combined annual production value of 400 million yuan ($57.2 million).

The township's largest chocolate producer Heijingang, which saw its total production value hit 300 million yuan last year, three times higher than the 18 other producers' combined value, has seen robust growth during the past few years, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deng Jingang, president of Heijingang, said the company's strong growth momentum is due to its consolidated foundations in offline market channels — its continued expansion in shopping malls, convenience stores and supermarkets rather than the e-commerce market.

He also takes pride in that Heijingang has one of the only two production lines from Switzerland's high-tech ingredient producer Buhler in Asia.

Heijingang has different brands including Heijing, Miyu and Ebays', and its business scope includes independent brand products and an original equipment manufacturing business for other brands including Hsu Fu Chi under Nestle.

During the past three years, the company invested up to 30 million yuan annually to boost its presence in brick-and-mortar stores and more plans in the retail market are in the pipeline.

Deng said: "Those efforts have paid off. For domestic chocolate producers, online sales have narrow profits due to the ever-rising thresholds in online portals and the traffic control behind them amid the saturated competition."

Other domestic producers located in the township, including Fulienong and Putiantongle, believe they are feeling the pinch from online sales and haven't made a great foray into the online market.

Above: Workers are seen at Heijingang's chocolate production line in Taiping township, Tianjin, on May 6.
Left: A customer checks out chocolate products at Heijingang's retail store in Taiping township on May 6.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

400 million yuan
combined annual production value of all the 19 chocolate producers in Taiping township in Tianjin

"Burning money on logistics is difficult for us ... online sales have slim profits," said a delegate of another producer.

Eyeing this, the township plans to open an account on social media platform Douyin soon, to help them close the gap. Deng also noted that domestic chocolate producers are tackling challenges in attracting seasoned professionals and boosting technological innovations.

A recent research report from ChinaIRN, a market research website, indicated that foreign brands have 90 percent of the market share in the domestic chocolate sector.

The report expects that domestic producers will focus more attention on sugar reduction and dark chocolate — in a bid to snatch a bigger share of the market.

Tianjin uptick reflects consumption recovery

TIANJIN — Inside a modern building in the Xiaobailou business district of Tianjin, Tihanyi Istvan from Hungary is explaining the history and tasting methods of Hungarian red wine to dozens of customers at a wine-tasting session.

In 2018, after graduating with a master's degree from Tianjin University, Istvan stayed in the city to start his own business. He took Hungary's distinctive red wine as a starting point for imports and sales, boosting the presence of his nation's products in the Chinese market.

Since the beginning of 2023, his company has seen a significant increase in the number of customers and orders, while more wine-tasting events were held during the first quarter.

Despite the effect of the pandemic, Istvan once again saw unlimited business opportunities from the stable and positive trend of Chinese commodities consumption this year.

"We had a full container of imported red wine recently delivered to Tianjin Port and our business has been very busy this year," said Istvan, general manager of Tianjin Fulin Teya International Trade Co Ltd, who has two orders that are currently being negotiated.

In terms of retail business, the per capita consumption of customers at the store was around 500 yuan ($71.5) before 2023. Starting this year, tens of thousands of consumers have paid a visit to Istvan's store, creating consumption of over 1,000 yuan per capita.

When taking time off from his busy schedule, Istvan loves to walk by the Haihe River and the Ancient Cultural Street, a famous business district in Tianjin.

In July 2021, Tianjin, along with Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing and Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, was approved to take the lead in conducting the cultivation and construction of international consumption centers in China. Now, the business districts of Tianjin have become platforms connecting global consumer markets, attracting consumers from all over the world.

In Isetan, one of the best-known foreign department stores in Tianjin's century-old Jinjie commercial district, business has steadily soared.

"The mall brings together approximately 400 brands, with a daily customer flow of around 10,000 people on weekdays and more than 20,000 at weekends," said Yang Jie, director and general manager of Tianjin Isetan Co Ltd.

A foreign employee is busy working at a trade company in Tianjin in March. LIU WEIZHEN / XINHUA

"The boost of foreign shopping malls and China's consumption market have released positive signals for overseas product manufacturers, while also demonstrating the recovery of China's consumer market," Yang said.

Sun Jiannan, director of the Tianjin Commission of Commerce, said that with the implementation of various consumption promotion policies, Tianjin's consumption potential is gradually being unleashed. The city has designated 2023 as the Year of Consumption and will continue to hold a variety of promotional activities.

Tianjin's upbeat performance is just one of the examples reflecting the broader picture of revived consumption in China. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the total retail sales of consumer goods increased by 5.8 percent year-on-year in the first quarter.

During the period, China's foreign trade reached 9.89 trillion yuan, up 4.8 percent year-on-year, reversing a decline of 0.8 percent in the first two months of the year.

The World Trade Organization released a report earlier this month predicting that global trade will increase by 1.7 percent in 2023, up from the previous estimate of 1.0 percent last October. China's adjustment of its COVID-19 measures is a "key factor" in this increase and the reopening of China is expected to boost international trade, the report said.

This year, Istvan's company plans to import Hungarian beer and meat for sale in the Chinese market, expanding its business scope while building a bridge for communication and exchange, attracting more Hungarian enterprises to develop in China.

"With the recovery of international consumption in China, I believe that the company's business will also move forward," he said.

XINHUA

Confidence in China boosted by economic rebound

TIANJIN — Increased inquiries for hotel rooms, catering and event reservations have thrilled Javier Gimeno, cluster general manager for Marriott International Group.

Gimeno, from Spain, was invited to Tianjin to manage the Marriott and Four Points by Sheraton hotels, which are adjacent to the National Convention and Exhibition Center, and has been in this management role since February.

"This year's hotel business is expected to far exceed that of last year. The future business outlook is more positive," said Gimeno.

Both hotels have experienced a strong rebound in business, thanks to China's stable economic recovery and increase in people's mobility.

China's huge consumption market gives Gimeno much confidence. Marriott International Group currently operates more than 450 hotels in approximately 120 cities in China and is expected to have over 700 hotels in the country by 2025, according to the company.

The value-added output of China's service sector rose 5.4 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2023, which contributed 69.5 percent to overall GDP growth. The accommodation and catering sector surged 13.6 percent over the period.

As CEO of LifePlus, an international education institution, Martin Klopper, from the United Kingdom, was delighted to obtain a multiple-entry visa for China this year to attend conferences and better understand the market.

LifePlus opened its first school in Tianjin in 1986. With more foreign-funded enterprises investing in China, LifePlus has set up five schools in five other cities, with over 2,000 students in total.

Klopper previously had lived in China for nearly 20 years. "China is our most valued market. I believe our market will continue to expand and more foreign companies will come to the country to find opportunities in the future."

Yokota Kaei, director of Aioi Nissay Dowa Insurance (China) Co Ltd, has been in Tianjin for a decade.

"I first came to Tianjin in 2004. The rapid development here is amazing," he said.

The company seized the opportunity provided by China's rapid development in auto consumption from 2007 to 2022, expanding its business scale by about 15 times, with its registered capital increasing from 200 million yuan ($28.6 million) to 1 billion yuan.

Kim Won-seob, with Industrial Bank of Korea (China) Ltd, views the accelerated digitalization and localization transformation of the company as important strategies needed to deeply cultivate the Chinese market.

"China's swift economic recovery is beyond our expectations this year," said Kim. The company has actively formulated business plans, especially loans targeting high-tech, eco-friendly companies and personal consumption.

"The broad market gives us the confidence to deeply develop in China," Kim said.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that China's import and export of services totaled about 969.6 billion yuan in the January-February period, rising 1.7 percent year-on-year. Imports of services climbed 14.7 percent year-on-year to about 557.3 billion yuan in this period.

"We are looking forward to sharing opportunities resulting from China's economic recovery and growth," said Yokota.

XINHUA

LIFE

Show re-creates legendary tale

Classic story, with ethnic group performers concerning Wuzhi Mountain and Monkey King, takes to the stage, promotes cultural diversity and aims to boost tourism, **Chen Bowen** reports in Haikou.

Top: The main characters of *Adventures in Wuzhi Mountain* talk about their admiration for the Monkey King. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Above left:** Shuiman leads a group to fight beasts in the Wuzhishan Tropical Rainforest. **Above right:** The young protagonist Shuiman with his adopted mother. **Below:** A group photo of the actors. PHOTOS BY ZHANG JIANGYING / FOR CHINA DAILY

When Wuzhi Mountain, the highest mountain in South China's Hainan province, is mentioned, many people's first thought will be of the classic novel *Journey to the West* and its protagonist Sun Wukong, the Monkey King.

In the tale, the Monkey King tries to escape from the Buddha's hand, but the Buddha turns over his palm and changes his five fingers into a mountain — named Wuzhi Mountain — and traps the mischievous monkey for 500 years.

With this seemingly mythological connection to the popular literary figure, who travels with his mentor — the saintly monk Tang Xuanzang — to India to bring back holy scriptures and enlighten his countrymen, residents in the Wuzhi Mountain area, today's Wuzhishan city, have been inspired by the troublemaker-turned-hero's spirit for centuries.

This is how the story unfolds in the large-scale live performance, *Adventures in Wuzhi Mountain*, which debuted on April 30 in Shuiman township in the city of Wuzhishan.

At the beginning of the show, the kind and brave people of the Li and Miao ethnic groups rescue an infant wrapped in a red swaddling cloth from a flood, name him Shuiman and raise him. As Shuiman grows up, he adores the Monkey King and is later inspired to protect his hometown and its people.

"In the live performance, spectators can not only see scenes from the daily lives of the Li and Miao ethnic groups, and associate with the legend of the Monkey King, but also witness the growth of a young man, understand the Chinese national spirit and see the value of diligence, kindness, courage, tenacity, wisdom and unity," says Chen Lei, director of *Adventures in Wuzhi Mountain*.

With high-tech stage lighting and visual design, the immersive show takes the mythical Wuzhishan Tropical Rainforest as its backdrop, combines the unique culture and joyous life of the Li and Miao people, and adopts the legend of the Wuzhi Mountain and the Monkey King.

Within five chapters, it tells the story of how the good-hearted and hard-working Li and Miao people build their homes, create a civilization, and unite to resist natural disasters.

Zhao Limin, art director of *Adventures in Wuzhi Mountain*, explains that the show incorporates a beautiful story with live performance.

"We present Wuzhishan city's culture and customs through art and color, and more importantly, give the show a spiritual core and present it in the form of a story," he says.

"Wuzhishan city, China's big natural oxygen bar, is a simple and primitive place, full of ethnic culture. Here, we can feel the happiness of Hainan people," says Chen.

"If you get close to the life of the Li and Miao people, you'll feel their passion from the inside out. They embrace the world with a love for life."

The show, which lasts 55 minutes, features breathtaking acrobatics and local performances, including gongs and drums, coconut tree climbing, Li-style brocade-weaving, tea picking and campfire dances.

> "If you get close to the life of the Li and Miao people, you'll feel their passion from the inside out. They embrace the world with a love for life."
>
> **Chen Lei,** director

The majority of the show's actors are from Hainan province.

Among them are 70 inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, including performers of the Hainan dragon-summoning dance, Li folk songs, bamboo and wood musical instruments, and the *panhuang* dance of the Miao ethnic group, which is a tribute commemorating their ancestor, "Emperor Pan".

"The real-life setting of the show blows my mind with its colorful Li and Miao ethnic cultures and the vivid and moving storyline," says Wang Sheng, a spectator from Haikou, the capital city of Hainan.

"I particularly enjoy the way that Monkey King never appears in the *Adventures in Wuzhi Mountain*, but that the show's protagonist Shuiman refers to the literary hero from time to time, and the protagonist himself becomes a loyal, responsible and courageous 'Monkey King' to safeguard his hometown. I believe the director is trying to convey the idea that everyone can be a Monkey King," Wang adds.

Chen says: "We hope to provide a platform in which actors and spectators can have a dialogue with the Monkey King across time and space, and the spirit of the legendary figure can bring endless hope to the spectators."

The show was named *Adventures in Wuzhi Mountain*, as the crew aims to deliver an unexpected artistic performance, according to Chen.

"Adventures refer to the unexpected ways people meet up and form interesting social relationships," he explains.

In the show, for example, there is a wise old man named Uncle Dragon, who witnesses Shuiman growing into a young man.

"The dragon is a symbol in Chinese culture that unites all the ethnic groups. Li and Miao people's worship for the auspicious mythological creature is in line with that of the Han people, who originated in the Central China Plains," says Chen.

The live performance is a cooperation with Henan Satellite TV, known for producing programs inspired by traditional Chinese culture. It was aired on May 2 on the Henan Satellite TV channel.

Adventures in Wuzhi Mountain is also part of Hainan's "Sanyuesan Festival" — a Li and Miao holiday that takes place on the third day of the third month of the lunar calendar.

Bringing nature together with mythology, the show is expected to promote the Li and Miao cultures, the tropical rainforest of Wuzhishan and explore the innovative integration of the city's culture and tourism, says Zhu Hongling, the Party secretary of Wuzhishan city.

"Hopefully, we can vary the show's storylines, choreography and music, and commercialize it for this summer's tourists," Zhu adds.

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Sustainability key to new Yangtze River revenue stream

By XU LIN
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Yangtze River, one of the "mother rivers" of China, symbolizes the nation's rich history and culture, with its awe-inspiring currents and picturesque views along its banks.

Since the country is witnessing a boom in its domestic tourism, especially during the recent May Day holiday, destinations along the river are proving popular among travelers.

The launch ceremony for the 2023 Yangtze River Tourism Overseas Promotion Season recently kicked off in Yichang, Central China's Hubei province.

The event centers on the theme of "protecting the golden waterway and boosting green development", aiming to promote the diverse culture of the Yangtze River to the international community and demonstrate the results of ecological progress and the sustainable development of the Yangtze River Basin.

It was co-organized by the Network of International Culturalink Entities, Hubei provincial department of culture and tourism, and Yichang city government.

The Yangtze River international golden tourism belt covers Shanghai, Chongqing and nine provinces, including Jiangsu, Hunan, Yunnan and Guizhou, all rich in culture and tourism resources.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism unveiled 10 national-level Yangtze River-themed tourist routes at the event: culture of the river, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, key water control projects and irrigation engineering, Red tourism (tourism related with revolutionary legacy), ecology, natural scenery, rural vitalization, intangible cultural heritage, unique landforms and urban leisure.

A further 38 boutique travel routes along the tourism belt were also launched, to meet the diversified demand of tourists. The various themes include the Three Gorges Project, mountains, traditional Chinese gardens, ethnic group villages and wildlife.

The section of the Yangtze River in Yichang city, Central China's Hubei province, draws numerous tourists with its beauty. XU LIN / CHINA DAILY

Until the end of June, photos, short videos and livestreams about the beauty of the Yangtze River are being shown online to a global audience.

The China Cultural Center will hold events to promote river tourism resources in Paris and Tokyo in early June.

Wan Ting, deputy director of the Network of International Culturalink Entities, says that the event aims to tell the beautiful cultural stories of the Yangtze River in a way that is understandable to the world.

"Today's tourism industry should focus on safe and sustainable ecotourism. This means promoting responsible travel and quality tourism, adopting an environmental management system, safeguarding biodiversity, increasing green investment in tourism and encouraging the development of new and clean technologies," said Arthayudh Srisamoot, ambassador of Thailand to China, who attended the event in Yichang.

He believes that it's important to educate tourists and people in the area that maintaining the environment is as essential as improving livelihoods and identifying tourist attractions in the region.

"The Chinese government has implemented a number of policies to preserve the Yangtze River. ... Yichang city, where the Three Gorges Dam is located, is a good example of the successful preservation of the great river," he says.

Yuk Sengponleur, tourism attache of the Embassy of Cambodia in China, who was present at the event, agreed.

"I'm impressed by the cruise along the Yangtze River in Yichang, taking you from downstream to upstream with a large ship lift. Such travel experiences along the river are also combined with nature and local ethnic group culture," he says.

Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

LIFE

ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

Former doctor preserves the natural legacy of Dongting Lake through the art of taxidermy, **Wang Qian** and **Feng Zhiwei** report in Changsha.

The hundreds of taxidermy displays at the Dongting Lake biodiversity gallery in Sanyantang village, Hunan province, give a glimpse into how prosperous and diverse the natural environment of the area around China's second-largest freshwater lake once was.

Behind these specimens is the 73-year-old taxidermist Li Wenjian, a retired doctor of the Yuanjiang epidemic prevention station in Yuanjiang city, Hunan.

Since 1983, Li has stuffed and preserved more than 1,400 animals, insects and plants from the lake's environs in order to enable people to understand the local flora and fauna better.

"Dongting Lake nurtures a bounty of life, and through taxidermy, some deceased and endangered animals have been brought back to 'life'," Li says, adding that he hopes his creations will help raise people's awareness of the needs to protect the biodiversity of what he calls the "mother lake".

In his eyes, these specimens show respect for the life of the creatures and, what's more, they enable people to reflect on the relationship between people and nature.

Due to the intensification of agricultural practices and re-engineering of the waterways since the 1950s, the lake had been reduced to half its size — from about 6,000 square kilometers recorded in 1852 to less than 2,700 sq km in 2003. As one of the wetlands that make up the floodplains of the Yangtze River, Dongting Lake is an important habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife.

"The lake in my childhood memory has gradually disappeared, which has often worried me," Li says, adding that, in the 1960s, fishermen would frequently encounter finless porpoises and various other wild animals, such as barking deer and weasels.

Born in 1950, he has lived alongside the lake all his life and has witnessed how human activities, such as overfishing and illicit sand mining, have changed the lake and its environment.

A graduate of the Yiyang Medical College, in 1975, the then 25-year-old Li was allocated to a job at the Yuanjiang epidemic prevention station by the local government. Several years later, he attended the epidemiological investigation of leptospirosis (a widespread and prevalent zoonotic disease that can lead to organ failure) in the lake area.

During the investigation, Li made hundreds of taxidermied specimens of wild rats, which had been one of the sources of rodent-associated human infection. Once, on his way to collect rats for examination, he saw a dead thrush that had been killed by pesticide use. Taking it home, he prepared, molded and mounted the deceased bird.

Through his handiwork, he was able to make the bird look "alive" again, which was the moment Li realized what he could do to help his mother lake — to honor the deceased lake dwelling creatures and give them "a new life".

Over the past four decades, Li has created more than 1,400 specimens, from whole taxidermied animals to single pressed flowers, in his spare time. Some of the species in his collection of flora and fauna have since been pushed to endangerment or extinction. For Li, it is a "solemn" task.

"If a species can only be appreciated in this form, as well as feeling regret, we should think further — when people destroy the habitats of animals and plants, how much space do we leave for our own survival?" Li says.

Among his taxidermied works, some rodents and insects are captured and modeled for epidemiological research. Some of these are birds, animals and fish bought from local farmers' markets or restaurants, and some are sent to him by local authorities for taxidermy display or study.

A pair of wild Chinese milu deer are among the most challenging specimens that Li has worked on. In July 2016, the pair were drowned in rising floodwaters at the lake. After salvaging the deer and carrying out a postmortem, the Yuanjiang Forestry Bureau contacted Li to preserve them.

Weighing more than 400 kilograms in total, it took Li one and a half months to get the deer to "stand on their feet" again. He had to conquer the scorching heat of summer and pungent odor of the disinfectant, because if the corpse decayed, the taxidermy would fail.

According to Li, this is a complex process. After measuring the body, the deer is skinned with its meat, skull, bones and internal organs removed. While the skin dries out, the steel-framed mannequin is prepared. After anti-corrosion treatment, the deer is mounted with its skin repositioned around the mannequin, its feet arranged and glass eyes are inserted for the final touch.

"You can't rush any step. One mistake can ruin the whole thing," Li says, adding that the larger the animal is in size, the longer the taxidermy process is.

In sculpting the steel mold for one of the deer, Li's left leg was injured by an electric cutter. To save time, Li didn't go to hospital, he just sutured the wound by himself.

However, when he got the two deer to "stand as if they were alive again", Li's sense of achievement outweighed the difficulties.

"For some people, the practice of taxidermy may seem strange, or even terrifying, but preserving nature through individual lives is still valuable in scientific research and showcases the great diversity of nature to the public," Li says.

Cooperating with Yuanjiang Science and Technology Association, Li has held exhibitions of his specimens on the street and on campus to raise the public awareness about biodiversity and environmental protection.

Last year, the Dongting Lake biodiversity gallery, covering more than 500 square meters, was built to display Li's creations.

Yang Jianjun, Party secretary of Sanyantang village, hopes that the gallery will enrich the cultural lives of local residents and be developed into a scenic spot, bringing more tourists to Sanyantang.

Still not satisfied with the gallery's current condition, Yang says that a company has been hired to renovate it with an investment of about 4 million yuan ($575,222).

At the entrance of the gallery, there are eight rabbits welcoming the visitors, an installation designed by Li to mark the Year of the Rabbit.

Li is also glad to see that dramatic changes have occurred in and around Dongting Lake thanks to the government's efforts. In 2020, a 10-year fishing moratorium was established on the lake.

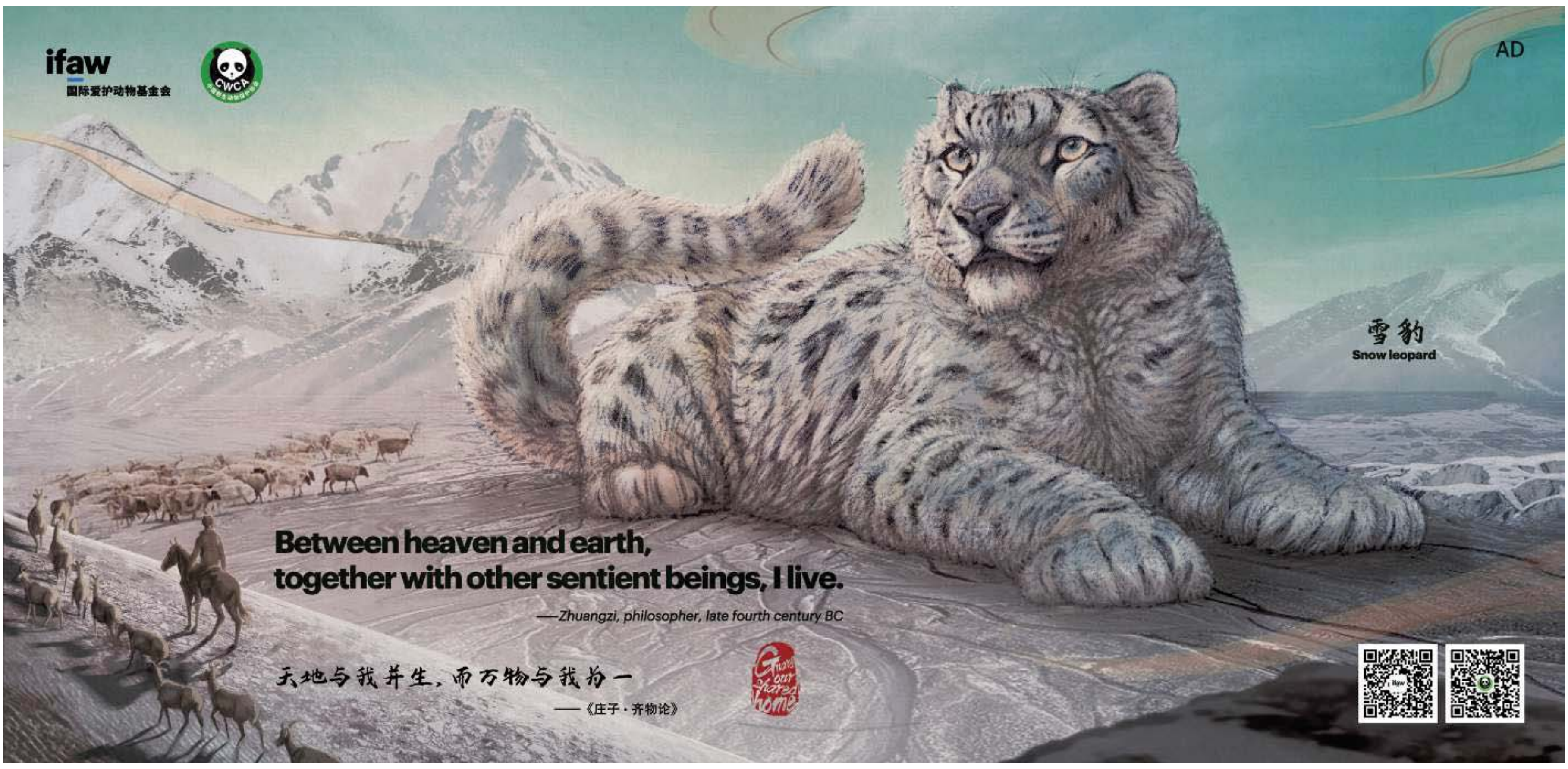
The population of indicative and endangered species has increased, or has been stabilized, such as winter migratory birds, Chinese milu deer and Yangtze finless porpoises, according to local environmental department.

In February last year, a record-high 404,000 waterfowl, representing 74 species, were spotted at Dongting Lake.

Walking around the lake, Li has seen Chinese mergansers, milu deers and white eels, which he says he finds thrilling, as if meeting old friends.

Contact the writers at wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Top: Dongting Lake provides a winter retreat for migratory waterfowl, such as bean geese and swan geese. LI GA / XINHUA
Above: Li Wenjian gives the final touch on a taxidermied bird at the Dongting Lake biodiversity gallery in Sanyantang village, Hunan province. ZHOU SANGQI / FOR CHINA DAILY
Left: With open wings, a pond heron specimen is preserved by Li. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Below: A Chinese milu deer at east Dongting Lake's rescue center for wild animals in Yueyang, Hunan province. CHEN SIHAN / XINHUA



LIFE

Infused with history

The humble tea leaf is not merely the basis of a popular millennia-old beverage. It is an integral part of China's economic and social foundations and has helped the nation forge bonds all over the world.

Signature drinks vary from country to country. When it comes to beer, naturally, we think of Belgium or Germany; whiskey, there's a good case for both Scotland and Ireland; coffee, a bit complicated, but Ethiopia, Brazil and Columbia, among others, immediately spring to mind. However, when we talk about tea, in terms of its birthplace, diversity, as well as production and consumption volume — there is only one answer: China.

Tea drinking has been an integral part of Chinese heritage and culture for centuries. For the Chinese, tea is not only adored as a pleasant beverage with a fragrant aroma, but also a necessity in Chinese people's daily lives, and is of profound significance to the economic and social development of the country.

Chinese tea has a long history, and it is a story of gradual refinement. The original idea is credited to the legendary Shennong, who, as far back as 2000 BC, discovered tea accidentally and found it could detoxicate the herbs and plants he was tasting, beginning a tradition that continues until today.

As a recreational drink, tea became popular during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). From it, a tea culture was established and spread throughout China, particularly after the completion of *The Classic of Tea* — an encyclopedia by Lu Yu, in the 8th Century, which compiled and recorded all the information about tea in different places of China, its origin, techniques for making the beverage and the correct way to drink it. Later, he earned the moniker "Sage of Tea".

Chinese tea culture flourished in the Song Dynasty (960—1279), during which the act of whisking tea became popular. The tea was first ground into fine powder, then hot water was added and tea was whisked in a bowl with a brush to create a foam, similar to how warm milk is treated to make a Cappuccino today. This method of preparing tea was later introduced to Japan and became the basis of Japanese matcha.

In China, during the Yuan and Ming dynasties (1271—1644), tea-making techniques continued to evolve, and that's when steeping became the primary way of preparing tea. During the Qing Dynasty (1644—1911), the use of loose-leaf tea became the norm that continues to today.

Chinese tea culture is very rich in both physical and spiritual terms. Physically, it consists of tea cultivation, brewing, serving techniques, methods of consumption and the tea ceremony. Spiritually, it contains the wisdom of oriental philosophy, reflecting the doctrines of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism.

As the core of the tea culture, the Chinese tea ceremony, which is also referred to as "tea art", focuses on achieving harmony through the tea, water, utensils, preparation, environment, atmosphere, music, infusion techniques and interpersonal relationships. Each cup of tea is brewed with ritual, and in the process of self-improvement for ancient Chinese literati and modern enthusiasts, etiquette is learned, inner peace is pursued, aesthetic and moral values are cultivated, and friendships are revived.

From top: Tourists experience tea picking in Shuanglian village, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in April. GU ZHAOMING / FOR CHINA DAILY A high-speed train passes through tea plantations in China. LIU HAO / FOR CHINA DAILY Zhou Mingbo, an inheritor of the Song Dynasty tea whisking method, decorates a cup of tea with the name "golden mountain". FENG JIANGJIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Tea has an obvious significance in improving personal health. Regular tea drinking can activate a detoxification process and help strengthen the body. Physical health is the prerequisite for pleasure and nourishment, and only through self-enjoyment can one sublimate the realm of life, and, thus, in return improve its quality. As the saying goes: One must see the world in a tea leaf; and heaven in a cup of tea. That's why, as a living heritage, Chinese tea enjoys huge popularity among all social strata, from ancient emperors and literati, to modern grassroots Chinese.

Chinese tea culture highlights tranquility within oneself and harmony with the others. Tea also serves as a bridge connecting China and the world.

It was the Dutch who first introduced Chinese tea to Europe, marking the start of tea drinking on the continent. The massive import of Chinese tea to Europe began in the 17th century. From 1720, the demand for tea, in Britain particularly, grew so rapidly that tea drinking became popular among people at all levels of society, making Britain the largest importer during the maritime tea trade in the 18th century.

The Tea Horse Road, which was part of a centuries-old trade network linking China with Southeast Asia and India, as well as the Maritime Silk Road, which was the maritime section of the historic Silk Road that connected China, the Arabian Peninsula and Europe, have both contributed to the Chinese tea trade and global cultural exchanges.

In 2020, the EU and China signed a geographical indications agreement, aiming to protect the intellectual property rights of European and Chinese products. The agreement ensures that only products originating from specific regions and meeting certain quality standards, or enjoying a reputation linked to the production territory, can be sold under protected names, such as Champagne, which can only come from a specific region in France, and various types of tea from China.

In November 2022, traditional tea processing techniques and their associated social practices in China were added to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In celebration of this historic development, we are happy to present the *Tea for Harmony Exhibition*, accompanied by a series of performances and workshops at the China Cultural Center in Brussels in early May. As an invitation extended to those who'd like to join a tea journey into the past, the present and the future, the exhibition (running until June 9) intends to build friendly exchanges and mutual understanding between Europeans and Chinese through the charm of this magic leaf.

The author is Zhan Jie, Second Secretary, Culture & Tourism, Mission of China to the European Union.

'Snow' in May is a small price to pay

Warren Singh-Bartlett
Second Thoughts

It happens every spring. As the flowers blossom, bringing color and fragrance back into our lives, Beijing's air fills with fluffy white invaders: airborne clumps of seed hairs that settle in heaps in corners, and drift like micro-tumbleweed across rooftops and streets.

They come from the hundreds of thousands of female poplars and willows planted around the city, each capable of contributing between one and three kilograms of the stuff every year.

Jokingly referred to as "snow in April" — although the "snow" lasts well into May and arrives in several waves — this annual invasion is the bane of walkers, cyclists, and scooter riders, largely because of its uncanny knack to find its way up nostrils, and into mouths and eyes.

As someone who delights in scootering around Beijing, it is irritating but, at worst, an encounter that necessitates no more than a quick stop to scrub the captive hair from an eye. But in some people, it triggers allergic reactions like rhinitis, asthma, and even dermatitis.

Apparently, it is also a fire hazard, and so is conscientiously swept away to avoid unfortunate encounters with errant cigarette butts.

As problems go, this one is new(ish). The trees were among many millions planted since the 1980s to surround Beijing with a green belt. This was not just to make the capital a more beautiful and pleasant place to live, but to keep a greater and more traditional nuisance at bay: sandstorms.

In that, they have largely succeeded, and while we have had a few more storms this year due to a couple of poor winters that have dried the vast plains of Mongolia more rapidly than usual — compared to 30 or 40 years ago, Beijing's sandstorm season is almost a thing of the past.

According to the Beijing Meteorological Observatory, there were an average of 26 days of dusty springtime weather in the 1950s, and into the 1960s, the capital was on the verge of desertification.

Seed hairs from willow and poplar trees resemble snow as they fill the air at a residential community in Fengtai district, Beijing, in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Naturally, remedying that was vital and, so, as part of the broader national effort to reforest, and keep deserts at bay, a green belt was planted in and around Beijing.

Poplars and willows were chosen for their resistance to cold, drought and pests. As they also require relatively little care and even less watering, they were the ideal choice for the pre-South-North Water Transfer Project city.

Focused on keeping sandstorms at bay, by the time authorities realized that female poplars weren't the right choice, too many had been planted to make chopping them down either feasible, or desirable. Exacerbating matters was the fact that many had been planted along streets or squares, hard surfaces where the seed hairs accumulate, only to be lifted into the air by passing cars or gusts of wind.

Two solutions have been found (well three if you include not planting more female trees). The first is a kind of birth control, and the second is a type of sterilization.

Birth control is administered in the form of an injection, which, like the flu vaccine, must be renewed yearly. It prevents female trees from producing catkins (and hence seed hairs), but isn't cheap, although it does result in the intriguing spectacle of bottles fixed, IV-style, to trunks. Sterilization, which involves removing the upper branches of a female tree and grafting male branches in their place, is even more expensive.

Consequently, neither approach has been widely used apart from around sensitive areas like hospitals, kindergartens and schools.

Poplars and willows are still being planted. They are, after all, hardy and do an excellent job of absorbing CO2, cooling the streets, and providing green relief, but female trees have been banned since 2015. As their numbers decrease, so will the April Snows. Thankfully, though, the protective effect of their millions of siblings will continue to make capital life more comfortable.

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SPORTS

SOCCER

Inter in dreamland

Milan derby delight sends Nerazzurri to first Champions League final in 13 years

Lautaro Martinez celebrates in front of the Inter Milan fans after scoring in Tuesday's Champions League semifinal, second leg against AC Milan at the San Siro. Inter advanced to the final 3-0 on aggregate. REUTERS

Inter Milan reached its first Champions League final in more than a decade with a 1-0 victory against city rival AC Milan on Tuesday.

Inter had a 2-0 lead from the first leg of the semifinal and Lautaro Martinez's 74th-minute goal ended any hope for Milan to stage a comeback.

Several players from both teams fell to the ground in tears at the final whistle as the Nerazzurri won the so-called "Euroderby" 3-0 on aggregate to progress to their first final since they won the league, Italian Cup and Champions League under Jose Mourinho in 2010. The Champions League final will be played at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium in Istanbul on June 10.

Inter players and staff celebrated for long afterward with their fans, singing and dancing in front of the Curva Nord in an electric atmosphere at San Siro — the stadium that both teams share.

"It's obviously a great emotion, a dream that I had together with the guys, that we nurtured right from when the draw was made," Inter coach Simone Inzaghi said. "We had to believe in ourselves and we have got here by merit, no one has gifted us anything.

"We had a long road, with difficulties but I think we earned it. I think probably from tomorrow we'll realize more what we have done. But it's a wonderful night with the fans, with our family, you can't ask for anything more."

Martinez, Inter's captain, hailed the cohesion of his team.

"What counts is the squad. I experienced it at the World Cup (with Argentina)," he said. "It makes it easy if you have a united squad with everyone pulling in the same direction. It means you get to play these very important matches in the best possible way."

He added: "After winning the World Cup and experiencing what is the pinnacle for a player, I knew we could reach this final, and we did it."

For Milan, the lengthy wait goes on. It last reached the showpiece event in 2007, when it won the last of its seven titles.

"At the moment there's only disappointment, there's only disappointment because we could have been in a Champions League final," Milan coach Stefano Pioli said. "But if we consider that last year we went out in the group stage and this year we managed to reach the semifinals we can and should be proud.

"But it's clear we dreamed of reaching the final, we wanted the final, we wanted to beat our rivals."

Milan was able to welcome back Rafael Leao. He missed last week's loss with a thigh injury and the Rossoneri were hoping he would inspire them to do the same.

The difference was immediately apparent as Milan played with an intensity it sorely lacked in the first leg amid a frantic start from both teams.

Brahim Diaz saw a weak shot comfortably smothered by Inter goalkeeper Andre Onana early on before Leao almost got Milan back into it with his first clear sight of goal, shortly before halftime. The winger sprinted into the left of the area but his angled drive grazed the outside of the far post.

Inter also had its chances to score the goal that would have all but killed the tie off as Henrikh Mkhitaryan fired over the bar, while Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan pulled off a brilliant quick-reaction save to keep out an Edin Dzeko header from close range.

Inter sealed its place in the final when Martinez made his way into left side of the area and exchanged passes with Romelu Lukaku — who had come on for Dzeko less than 10 minutes earlier — before firing in at the near post.

It was that same formidable attacking partnership that fired Inter to the Serie A title two years ago, earning the duo the nickname "LuLa".

"The biggest regret is the first 10 minutes of the first leg when we conceded two goals in three, four minutes," Pioli said. "And also not scoring tonight when we had the chances … that would have given us the enthusiasm, the energy, the extra confidence that could have helped us open up the match."

AGENCIES

AC Milan striker Olivier Giroud looks dejected after Tuesday's semifinal loss to Inter. REUTERS

Inzaghi hails 'immense' achievement

Inter Milan manager Simone Inzaghi said he never doubted that his team could reach the Champions League final as it completed a resounding 3-0 aggregate victory over city rival AC Milan on Tuesday.

A month ago, Inzaghi was under pressure after a lackluster run of results, yet his side has turned it around. The 1-0 semifinal, second-leg win over Milan was Inter's eighth victory in a row in all competitions.

"It was a dream at the start, but we always believed, we had an extraordinary run and to win the semifinal in a derby this way is immensely satisfying. We can only praise the lads," Inzaghi told Sport Mediaset.

Simone Inzaghi

Inter is third in Serie A and will face Fiorentina in the Coppa Italia final on May 24. Its return to form has been built on a solid defense, keeping six clean sheets in its current winning streak.

"I had said a long while back we would put in a crazy effort without looking at one competition or the other, just trying to achieve our best," he said.

Inzaghi basked in the glory of his team's victory over Milan, a fourth successive win over its city rival. Milan had not suffered four defeats in a single campaign against Inter since the 1973-74 season.

"They showed strength, determination, aggression, concentration, they were wonderful," he said. "We played four derbies since January and won all four, we know Milan is the (2021-22) champion of Italy and has huge quality, but the players were excellent and deserve to enjoy this evening."

Inter faces newly crowned Serie A champion Napoli on Sunday, and Inzaghi added: "I gave the players a day off tomorrow because we haven't had it since April 1. It was deserved. We'll meet again from Thursday because we have to prepare for a league match in Naples."

REUTERS

AC Milan's Davide Calabria and Rafael Leao console each other after Tuesday's defeat. REUTERS

TENNIS

Djokovic bristles at Norrie antics after ill-natured encounter

ROME — Novak Djokovic's angry glare made it clear how furious the 22-time Grand Slam champion was with his opponent.

And it wasn't just because Cameron Norrie hit him in the left calf with an overhead smash after Djokovic had already turned his back and conceded a point early in the second set of the Serbian's 6-3, 6-4 win on Tuesday.

There were also other instances of bad sportsmanship from Norrie, Djokovic said after reaching the Italian Open quarterfinals for the 17th straight year.

Djokovic also took issue with how his British opponent took a medical timeout just before he served out the match.

"I did watch the replay when he hit me. Maybe you could say he didn't hit me deliberately," Djokovic said when asked about his angry glare toward Norrie after the incident. "It was not so much maybe about that. … From the very beginning, he was doing all the things that were allowed. He's allowed to take a medical timeout. He's allowed to hit a player. He's allowed to say 'Come on' in the face more or less every single point from basically the first game.

"Those are the things that we players know in the locker room it's not fair play, it's not how we treat each other," Djokovic said. "He brought the fire, and I responded to that. I'm not going to allow someone behaving like this just bending my head. I'm going to respond to that."

Clearly motivated by Norrie's behavior, Djokovic produced arguably his best clay-court performance of the year against the 13th-seeded Norrie, who was not made available for interviews after the match.

Also on Campo Centrale, local hope Jannik Sinner was eliminated by Francisco Cerundolo 6-7 (3), 6-2, 6-2. Cerundolo will play Casper Ruud, who beat Laslo Djere 6-1, 6-3.

Aiming for his seventh title at the Foro Italico, Djokovic had his entire game clicking after struggling at times in the previous rounds and in his previous two tournaments on clay.

On an overcast day after it had rained all morning, Djokovic appeared focused from the start.

Britain's Cameron Norrie (left) and Serbia's Novak Djokovic have a frosty handshake after their Italian Open fourth-round match at Foro Italico in Rome on Tuesday. AFP

"I actually finished my warm-up 10 minutes before I went on the court. So I was rushing a bit with everything but we couldn't (warm up) earlier because of the rain," Djokovic said. "So I'm just glad to overcome today's challenge in straight sets and move on."

Djokovic was seen in the trainer's room before the match, having taken three weeks off before this tournament because of a lingering issue with his surgically repaired right elbow.

"Every day is something," the 35-year-old Djokovic said, without specifying what was bothering him.

Djokovic committed less than half as many unforced errors as Norrie, 14-29; and had two more winners, 21-19.

Norrie won a title on clay in Rio de Janeiro earlier this year, beating Carlos Alcaraz in the final.

Djokovic will lose the No 1 ranking to Alcaraz after this tournament — even though Alcaraz was beaten by 135th-ranked Hungarian qualifier Fabian Marozsan in the third round on Monday.

Alcaraz will, therefore, be seeded No 1 and Djokovic will be No 2 at the French Open, which starts on May 28.

Djokovic will next face seventh-seeded Holger Rune in a rematch of the Paris Masters final that the 20-year-old Dane won in November. Rune beat Australian qualifier Alexei Popyrin 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.

"He's really fit physically, great defense, but also great counter-puncher," Djokovic said of Rune.

"He can hurt you from both the forehand and the backhand side. Really solid serve. Aggressive returns. Just an all-around player on all surfaces."

Rune reached the final of the Monte Carlo Masters last month.

"It's going to be a very physical match," Djokovic added.

Also, Daniil Medvedev beat 2017 champion Alexander Zverev for the third time this year, 6-2, 7-6 (3), after they also met in Indian Wells, California, and Monte Carlo. Medvedev hadn't won a match in three previous visits to Rome but will now play German qualifier Yannick Hanfmann for a spot in the semifinals.

Hanfmann upset Monte Carlo champion Andrey Rublev 7-6 (5), 4-6, 6-3.

Earlier, Zverev finished off a 6-4, 7-5 win over JJ Wolf in a match that was suspended because of rain at 3-3 in the second set on Monday.

Stefanos Tsitsipas eliminated Lorenzo Sonego 6-3, 7-6 (3) in another match that began on Monday. Tsitsipas was playing again later against another Italian, Lorenzo Musetti, in a match that started near midnight.

Musetti rallied past Frances Tiafoe 5-7, 6-4, 6-3 in another suspended match that had to be completed.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

Bumpy CBA season delivers hits and misses aplenty

Liaoning crowned champion again as emergence of promising young talents overshadowed by controversies

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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The Liaoning Flying Leopards celebrate retaining the CBA championship after sweeping the Zhejiang Golden Bulls in the Finals on Monday. XINHUA

Liaoning guard Zhao Jiwei is presented with the Finals MVP award on Monday. XINHUA

Rookie forward Cui Yongxi enjoyed a breakout season for the Guangzhou Loong Lions. XINHUA

The emergence of a new generation of hoops stars was overshadowed by controversies on and off the court in an eventful Chinese Basketball Association season.

After enticing fans back to the stands and resuming the home-and-away format to shake off the pandemic chill, the positives of the 2022/23 season were offset by a lopsided Finals series and a match-fixing scandal involving two renowned coaches.

Roared on by 10,000 home fans, the Liaoning Flying Leopards routed Zhejiang Golden Bulls 106-70 on Monday to wrap up a 4-0 clean sweep in the best-of-seven Finals and earn the club's second straight league trophy — its third in total.

Despite Liaoning's dominance on the scoreboard, the series was a bruising affair and certainly did not lack for physicality, underlined by the injury-forced absences of key players on both teams. However, the obvious gap in talent and depth between the two clubs ultimately made for an underwhelming advertisement for the league.

Liaoning point guard Zhao Jiwei was named Most Valuable Player of the Finals for a second straight season after averaging 20 points, 8.8 assists, 3 rebounds and 3.5 steals over the four games.

His impressive individual performance, though, needs to be put in context, with Zhejiang starting guard Wu Qian and prolific American scorer Jarmar Gulley both limited by injuries throughout the series.

Liaoning head coach Yang Ming, however, took pride from the resilience and solidarity that carried the Flying Leopards through a challenging season.

"I think we deserve a lot of credit. We proved that we are the champions," Yang, a former national team guard, said at the postgame news conference.

"It's been a season full of ups and downs with a lot of challenges, especially during the regular phase when the pandemic prevention measures were still in place.

"There were several pauses in the season to accommodate the national team's schedule, which disrupted our momentum.

"Our key players were carrying injuries, yet someone always stepped up and contributed when it mattered.

"I am so proud of our group and the Liaoning fans as a whole."

Youth surge

Having arrived in the playoffs as the top-ranked team in the regular season, Zhejiang made franchise history by reaching the Finals for the first time, yet still came up short without experience on its side.

For the team's young talents, the deep postseason run was almost as valuable as championship rings, reckoned Zhejiang head coach Wang Shilong.

"Finishing without a trophy can hardly be considered a success in professional sports, but I am quite proud that I gave our young players enough space and opportunities to grow," said Wang.

With senior national team star Wu battling a rib injury, 23-year-old guard Cheng Shuaipeng stepped into the breach to lead the Golden Bulls charge. Cheng's postseason highlights reel included a buzzer-beating 3-pointer in Game 4 and 26 points in Game 5 of the semifinal victory over the Shenzhen Aviators as Zhejiang fought back from 2-1 down to win the best-of-five series.

Cheng finished 11 playoff games with a team-high average of 14.8 points and 4.2 assists to join a glittering cast of young players who made their presence felt in the league this season.

As another intriguing young prospect, Guangzhou Loong Lions' forward Cui Yongxi stood out in the regular season with exceptional athleticism and a versatile skillset that helped him land the Rookie of the Year award.

The 19-year-old national team player stepped up his game in the postseason by contributing 13 points, 8 rebounds and 2.8 assists per game to lead Guangzhou into the quarterfinals for the first time.

"He's improving every game by fighting hard and learning in each minute on the court. I hope he can keep progressing like this," Guangzhou head coach Guo Shiqiang, a former national team playmaker, said of Cui.

With the Chinese national team preparing for the 2023 FIBA World Cup, which tips off on Aug 25, the likes of Cui and Cheng are expected to add some much-needed depth to Aleksandar Djordjevic's squad.

With a place at next year's Paris Olympics awarded to the top-placed Asian team at the World Cup, Djordjevic looks set to pivot toward a more youthful squad at the expense of veterans such as former NBA forward Yi Jianlian, of the Guangdong Southern Tigers.

Broken image

However, while the young guns delivered cause for optimism, the match-fixing scandal involving two prestigious clubs undoubtedly damaged the league's reputation.

After a thorough investigation into the first-round playoff series between the Shanghai Sharks and Jiangsu Dragons, the CBA dished out the heftiest punishment in league history on April 17, condemning both teams for their "lack of competitive effort" and "game-throwing" violations.

Both clubs were disqualified from the remainder of the season and each was fined 5 million yuan ($714,600). Sharks head coach Li Chunjiang, a former coach of 11-time champion Guangdong, and his Jiangsu counterpart, Li Nan, a former Chinese national team coach, were banned from registering as basketball coaches for five and three years respectively.

In addition, Shi Linjie and Jiang Yusheng, general managers of Jiangsu and Shanghai, were suspended from involvement in any basketball-related jobs for five and three years respectively.

Both teams were found to "have intentionally thrown games" in favor of their opponents, the CBA investigation found.

After winning the first game 119-95, Shanghai rested most of its starters and foreign players in Game 2 on April 11, losing 97-90. In Game 3, Jiangsu players aroused suspicions when they turned the ball over five times — apparently on purpose — during the final 96 seconds to allow Shanghai to come back and secure the series with a 108-104 win.

Earlier in the year, the Xinjiang Flying Tigers' withdrawal from the league in protest at a CBA punishment generated more negative headlines for the league.

Xinjiang was later reinstated but the contract dispute with center Zhou Qi, which triggered the CBA punishment, remains unsettled.

Joker gets serious in win over Lakers

Los Angeles Lakers forward Anthony Davis tries to drive past Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic during Tuesday's Game 1. AP

DENVER — Nikola Jokic recorded his sixth triple-double of these playoffs with 34 points, 21 rebounds and 14 assists, powering the Denver Nuggets to a 132-126 win over the Los Angeles Lakers in the opener of the Western Conference finals on Tuesday night.

Behind the sizzling start and strong finish from the 'Joker', as well as Jamal Murray's 31 points, Denver beat the Lakers in the opener of the West finals for the first time ever.

After a slow start, Anthony Davis had 40 points and 10 rebounds, and LeBron James finished with 26 points, 12 boards and nine assists. Austin Reaves chipped in 23 points and fueled LA's desperate fourth-quarter run that nearly erased Denver's 14-point cushion after three.

The Nuggets led by as many as 21 but the Lakers pulled within three points twice in the fourth quarter, once on Reaves' 3-pointer at 124-121 and again on James' pair of free throws that made it 129-126 with 1:12 remaining.

"Yeah, it took us a half to get into the game," James said, "and that was pretty much the ball game right there. They punched us in the mouth to start. … I know the game is won in 48 minutes, but they set the tone in 24 minutes and we were playing catchup for the next 24."

In the fourth quarter, Rui Hachimura guarded Jokic, allowing Davis to crowd the paint and make things harder for the Nuggets' big man to dominate the paint. But it wasn't enough.

After Jokic sank two free throws with 26 seconds left to give Denver a 131-126 lead, Murray poked the ball from James as he was about to take it to the hoop and Jokic gathered the loose ball before being fouled with 10.9 seconds left. He sank one of two and James misfired from 3 as the seconds ticked off.

"I'd rather clean things up after a win in the Western Conference finals than after a loss, so I will take it," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "But much work to do."

Game 2 is Thursday night at Ball Arena, where the top-seeded Nuggets are 7-0 in the playoffs and 41-7 overall, the best home record in the league this season.

Jokic said a day earlier that the Nuggets desperately needed to avoid following in the sneaker-steps of the Memphis Grizzlies and Golden State Warriors, both of whom dropped their home opener to the Lakers and wound up losing in six games.

Moreover, James has won his last 20 playoff series in which his team has won the opener.

"We talked a lot about how the Lakers had gone into Memphis and Golden State and won Game 1 and wrestled control of the series right away," Malone concurred. "We've worked too hard for that. We don't want to give it away.

"And come Thursday night, it's gonna be even that much harder. Because you know, they're gonna get off to a better start, I imagine. And so our game-plan discipline and our defensive acumen have to be a lot better for closer to 48 minutes."

The Nuggets hadn't taken Game 1 against the Lakers since 1979, when they won the opener of the best-of-three series only to lose the next two. That's the closest the Nuggets have ever come to eliminating the Lakers, who have beaten Denver three times in the West finals, including in the Florida bubble in 2020.

Flashing his MVP credentials in a stunning display of power in the first quarter, Jokic pulled down a dozen of boards and dished out five assists to go with eight points. That made him the first player since at least 1997 to have a dozen or more boards and at least five assists in any quarter of an NBA playoff game.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

San Antonio hits the jackpot in Wembanyama sweepstakes

Coveted French prospect Victor Wembanyama is set to join San Antonio after the Spurs were awarded the top pick in next month's NBA draft. AP

CHICAGO — Victor Wembanyama is now set to begin his NBA career with the San Antonio Spurs, after they won the NBA draft lottery and the No 1 overall pick on Tuesday night.

The Spurs were one of three teams with the best odds — 14 percent — to land the No 1 pick, which they will almost certainly use on Wembanyama. The 7-foot-3 (2.21 meters) French 19-year-old is one of the most highly touted prospects in NBA history and will be expected to make an immediate impact on the league.

And he had a message for San Antonio.

"I'm trying to win a ring ASAP," Wembanyama told ESPN after the lottery results. "So be ready."

It's the third time the Spurs have won the lottery, and on both previous occasions they made picks that paid off for decades. They chose David Robinson in 1987, Tim Duncan in 1997, and those selections were a major part of how the Spurs became a team that won five NBA titles under coach Gregg Popovich.

"Our future was already bright," Spurs managing partner Peter J. Holt said. "Now, it's going to be through the moon."

Charlotte will pick second, Portland moved up to third, and Houston fell to fourth.

The Spurs were 22-60 this season, tied for the second-worst record in the NBA. Popovich and the Spurs have had incredible success with international players in the past — most notably, Manu Ginobili and Tony Parker, who owns the French team that Wembanyama played for last season.*

"He's an incredible young man," NBA commissioner Adam Silver told ESPN as part of its draft lottery broadcast. "He's 19 years old and I didn't take out a yardstick or meter stick or whatever they use in France, but he seemed all of 7-4 to me. … He clearly appears to be a generational talent."

Wembanyama finished his regular season with Boulogne-Levallois of France's top pro league earlier Tuesday, his 22-point effort was good enough for him to clinch the league's scoring title. It was shortly past 2 am on Wednesday in Paris when the lottery results were revealed, and Wembanyama was gathered with family and friends for a celebration.

"Can't really describe it," Wembanyama said in his interview with ESPN, adding: "It's a really special moment."

Finally, he knows where his NBA journey will begin. His agents did not respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press.

"I think the team that has the first choice isn't going to get it wrong," said Vincent Collet, Wembanyama's coach in France and also the coach of the French national team — which Wembanyama is expected to play this summer at the World Cup and next summer at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Detroit had the worst record in the NBA and was one of the three teams with the best odds of winning. The Pistons wound up falling all the way to fifth, the worst of their possible outcomes.

The rest of the lottery order: Orlando will pick sixth, Indiana seventh, Washington eighth, Utah ninth, Dallas 10th, Orlando (from Chicago as part of an earlier trade) in 11th, Oklahoma City 12th, Toronto 13th, and New Orleans 14th.

Wembanyama is wrapping up his third professional season in France and has been the consensus top pick for months. He has the height of a center, the shooting touch of a wing and the passing ability of a point guard.

He wasn't at the lottery because of his game schedule in France. But many of the other top prospects — Scoot Henderson of the G League Ignite, Brandon Miller of Alabama, twin brothers Amen and Ausar Thompson of the Overtime Elite program — were in the room to watch the lottery results get unveiled and get a better idea of where they may be heading to start their NBA careers.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA